

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Jungle Love

by Raymond
Lester

*A Story of Innocence
in the Wilderness*

10¢ PER COPY AUGUST 24 BY THE \$4.00

Get All Catalogs Compare Choice-Prices-Terms

We urge you to look everywhere before buying new furniture. Hurry-up purchases usually end in disappointment. We even advise against buying *now* the splendid bed bargain shown here. First get our catalog and see our whole department of beds in wood, steel and brass. It's the best plan to see a plentiful choice and get exactly what is likely to suit through years of service. Prices can then be compared—as well as terms. We ask only that you send for our book and lay it side by side with all others.

10,000 Furniture Bargains In Our Latest Free Book

The page size is unusually large so that all pictures are shown big. A great many things, like carpets, linoleums, blankets and comforters, are in actual colors. It not merely brings all items of furniture, but also the every-day household needs from cellar to garret.

You ought to have it, no matter where you finally buy. With it comes a credit certificate opening your charge account.

Our Credit Is Different Compare It Anywhere

Our credit never allows embarrassment or disappointment. Terms are so liberal that they scarcely admit of comparison.

We never ask for cash and do not want it. No discount is allowed for cash. No red tape—no annoyance—no collectors.

Famous Free Loan Offer

When you wish to see anything in our Bargain Book, you simply tell us so—just as you would ask us to send the bed shown here.

So we send your selection for a month's Free Loan—not merely to look at, but to use as if it were all bought and paid for.

One Dollar Brings Bed There are no strings whatever to this offer. Merely send one dollar deposit with your request. That's the way with everything shown in our big free book.

White Enamel Steel Bed. Has continuous posts and top rails $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. Five filling rods, $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch thick mortised into top and bottom rails by latest interlocking device. The patented corner lock for the side rails fits so firmly and bolted so rigidly that can never sag or rattle. 49 inches high at head end, 32 inches high at foot. 4 feet, 6 inches wide.

No. XB5434—Price \$13.85

Spiegel, May, Stern Co.

1442 West 35th Street
Chicago

Mail
Post Card
for Free Book Today

Longest Credit



SAVE

Pre-War Price \$100
Now \$64

In these days when the cost of many things is higher than before the war, it is a distinct contribution to business economy to offer through more direct selling methods such a great and decided saving on so popular a typewriter as the Oliver.

\$36

The Oliver Typewriter Company now sells direct. It has discarded old and wasteful ways. During the war we learned that it was unnecessary to have great numbers of traveling salesmen and numerous, expensive branch houses throughout the country. We were also able to discontinue many other superfluous, costly sales methods. You benefit by these savings. Our new way saves \$36 so we sell brand new Oliver Nines for \$64.



A Finer Typewriter at a Fair Price

Over 800,000 Sold

Send No Money

Note the coupon. It brings you an Oliver for 5 days free trial at no cost to you whatever. Decide for yourself whether you want to buy or not. Take advantage of this offer **NOW!** Clip the coupon before you forget.

The OLIVER
Typewriter Company

73B Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Free trial—No money down

Not a cent in advance. No deposit of any kind. No obligation to buy. The coupon is all you need send. The Oliver comes to you at our risk for five days' free trial in your own home. Decide for yourself whether you want to buy or not. If you don't want to keep the Oliver, simply send it back at our expense. We even refund the outgoing transportation charges. So you can't lose a cent on the free trial. If you do agree that it is the finest typewriter, regardless of price, and want to keep it, take a year and a half to pay at the easy rate of only \$4 a month.

Only 13c a day

Remember, you don't have to pay cash in full to us for the Oliver. We sell to you on easy payments. We give you over a year to pay for the machine. You send us only \$4 a month. This averages about 13 cents a day. Thus, it is easy now for practically everyone to own the splendid, speedy Oliver.

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY

73B Oliver Typewriter Building, Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay \$64 at the rate of \$4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.

My shipping point is This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name

Street Address

City State

Occupation or Business

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXIV

CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 21, 1920

NUMBER 3

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SIX CONTINUED STORIES

Jungle Love	Raymond Lester	385
A Five-Part Story — Part One		
The Stray-Man	Charles Alden Seltzer	414
A Six-Part Story — Part Two		
The Metal Monster	A. Merritt	466
An Eight-Part Story — Part Three		
Bing, Bang, Boom!	Raymond Leslie Goldman	492
A Five-Part Story — Part Four		
✓ How Many Cards?	Isabel Ostrander	524
A Seven-Part Story — Part Five		
Beware of the Bride	Edgar Franklin	550
A Six-Part Story — Part Six		

ONE NOVELETTE

The Whisperer	Max Brand	440
-------------------------	---------------------	-----

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

Raw Material	Herman Howard Matteson	406
See America First	Jack Bechdolt	429
The Gallery Gods	Murray Leinster	484
A Portrait of Hope	P. A. Price	512
✓ The Soul of Henry Jones	Ray Cummings	542
Teach: Pirate De Luxe	C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne	564
XIV — THE CHINESE		
A Dream That Would Not Fade	Cleveland Edwards	571

RESERVE A SEAT NEXT WEEK IN

"THE PURPLE LIMITED"

BY HENRY LEVERAGE

It will carry you through four fascinating instalments to a dénouement positively breath-taking

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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ADVERTISING SECTION.



An Amazingly Easy Way to Earn \$10,000 a Year

Let Me Show You How FREE

TO the average man the \$10,000 a year job is only a dream. Yet today there are a surprising number of men earning five figure salaries who were merely dreaming of them a short while ago. The secret of their success should prove a startling revelation to every ambitious man who has ever aspired to get into the \$10,000-a-year class.

There is nothing "different" about the man whose salary runs into five figures. He is made of the same stuff as you and I. For example, take J. P. Overstreet, of Dallas, Texas. A few short years ago he was a police officer earning less than \$1,000 a year. Today his earnings are in excess of \$1,000 a month—more than \$12,000 a year. C. W. Campbell, Greensburg, Pa., was formerly a railroad employe on a small salary—last month his earnings were \$1,562.

Why Don't YOU Get Into The Selling Field?

Read These Amazing Stories of Success

Earned \$524 in Two Weeks
I had never earned more than \$60 a month. Last week I cleared \$306 and this week \$218. You have done wonders for me.—Geo. W. Kearns, 107 W. Park Place, Oklahoma City, Okla.

I Now Earn as High as \$100 a Day
I took your course two years ago. Was earning \$15 a week clerking. Am now selling many of the largest firms in the U. S. I have earned more than \$100 a day. You secured me my position. Our Sales Manager is a graduate of yours.—J. L. DeBonia, 1628 S. Crawford Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Earned \$1,562 in Thirty Days
My earnings for the past thirty days are \$1,562.00 and I won Second Prize in March although I only worked two weeks during that month.—C. W. Campbell, Greensburg, Pa.

Earned \$1,800 in Six Weeks
My earnings for March were over \$1,000 and over \$1,800 for the last six weeks, while last week my earnings were \$356.00. I travel eleven months out of a year, working 5 days each week. The N. S. T. A. dug me out of a rut where I was earning less than \$1,000 a year and showed me how to make a success.—J. P. Overstreet, Dallas, Texas.

Mr. Overstreet, Mr. Campbell, and the others whose letters you see on this page are all successful salesmen. They have stepped into the \$10,000-a-year class—and they never sold goods before! It is hard to believe that such big success could come so quickly and easily. Yet it was all amazingly simple! Ask them the secret of their sudden success. They will tell you they owe it to the National Salesmen's Training Association. This is an organization of top-notch salesmen and sales managers formed expressly for the purpose of training men to sell and helping them to good selling positions. It has taken hundreds of men from all walks of life and made them Master Sales-

men—it has lifted them out of the rut and shown them the way to magnificent earnings, to fascinating careers and big selling positions.

We Train You And Help You Land A Job

What these men have done, you can do! In your spare time at home you can easily master the secrets of selling that make Star Salesmen. Whatever your experience has been—whatever you may be doing now—whether or not you think you can sell—just answer this question: Are you ambitious to earn \$10,000 a year? Then send me your name quick! I will prove to you without cost or obligation that you can easily become a Star Salesman. I will show you how the Salesmanship Training and Free Employment Service of the N. S. T. A. will help you to wonderful success in Selling.

Free Book on Salesmanship

Just mail the coupon or write for our great illustrated Book, "A Knight of the Grip," which we will send you Free. Let us prove to you that regardless of what you are doing now you can quickly become a Star Salesman. Let us show you how you too, can step into the ranks of the big money makers of business. See how easily you can learn this fascinating, big pay profession at home in your spare time. Learn what we have done for others and what we stand ready to do for you. Don't put it off until tomorrow—write us today. Mail the coupon at once.

National Salesmen's Training Association,
Dept. 2-K, Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

National Salesmen's Training Association,
Dept. 2-K, Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

Please send me, without any obligation on my part, your free book "A Knight of the Grip" and full information about the N. S. T. A. system of Salesmanship Training and Employment Service. Also a list showing lines of business with openings for salesmen.

Name
Street
City..... State.....

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	Combination Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	- \$1.50	\$4.00
THE ARGOSY COMB'		Less 25 cash discount
The Argosy	2.50	
All-Story Weekly		
Minimum space four lines.		

Oct. 24 Argosy Combination Forms Close Sept. 1st.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. \$2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made \$813.00 in one month. Nissen \$19.00 in three hours. Purviance \$207.00 in seven days. \$5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y-128, Dayton, Ohio.

AMBITIOUS? We will establish you in business; manufacture articles wanted everywhere, under your name, for 35c each (retailing \$1.50); show you how to reach consumers, dealers, agents, personally and by mail; furnish everything, and advertise for you free. Tremendous repeat business. Kaley of Brooklyn made \$1000 one month. Write for proof. Scientific Laboratories, 21 Court Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

SALESMEN—CITY OR TRAVELING. Experience unnecessary. Send for list of lines and full particulars. Prepare in spare time to earn the big salaries—\$2,500 to \$10,000 a year. Employment services rendered Members. National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 133-K, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat. Two coats in one. One side dress coat, other side storm overcoat. Guaranteed waterproof or money back. Not sold in stores. Big commission. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., 106 Rue Street, Dayton, Ohio.

SELL What Millions Want. New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue free. \$100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1038 W. Adams St., Chicago.

AGENTS—With experience, to sell our famous \$29.00 and \$35.50 made-to-measure suits and overcoats; big money-maker. Big selling outfits furnished free. Midland Tailors, Dept. 1, 318 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat. Two coats for the price of one. Something brand new. Not sold in stores. Latest style. Every man wants one. Binford sold 26 coats in five days. Write quick for sample and territory. Be first to introduce this big new seller. Thomas Raincoat Co., 1607 North St., Dayton, Ohio.

SALESMEN—Side or Main Line—to sell low priced 6,000 mile guaranteed tires; 30x3 1/2 non-skid sells for \$13.95; other sizes in proportion. Good money-making proposition for live wires. Master Tire Co., 1414 So. Michigan, Chicago.

INSIDE TYRES—Inner Armor For Auto Tires. Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blowouts. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

SALESMEN WANTED

BIG MONEY FOR SALESMEN. BUILD YOUR OWN BUSINESS SELLING OUR HIGH GRADE GROCERIES to your neighbors and others. Our quality goods and wholesale prices get orders and repeat orders. Beginners average \$8 a day profit. No investment required. Wonderful chance for money and independence. Our book "Opportunity" tells all about it. Write for it today. National Wholesale Grocers, Dept. 8, 112-118 N. May Street, Chicago.

REAL ESTATE—MICHIGAN

FARMSEEKERS ATTENTION! Use your credit with us and buy a farm home, 10 to 160 acres of hardwood land in Kalamazoo and Antrim counties, Michigan. \$15 to \$35 per acre. Small down payments, easy monthly terms. Close to schools, churches, markets, railroads, towns and neighbors. No swamps or stones. Raise fruit, grain, poultry or stock. Settlers tax-free for five years. Warranty Deed and Abstract of Title with every purchase. Write for free booklet. Swigart Land Co., 11245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED by 48 companies; \$10 to \$500 each paid for plays. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

Extraordinary Opportunity is offered ambitious men to become distributors for new product now being marketed. No competition; demand everywhere. Valuable exclusive rights free. Complete sales helps and full co-operation assures success. Start small and grow. \$1000 automobile free. Opportunity to establish large business netting \$10,000 yearly. Act immediately. Garfield Mfg. Co., Dept. A, Garfield Building, Brooklyn, N. Y.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WEAR A BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT made to your own measure. Free, and make \$35 to \$50 every week? You can be the best dressed man in your town and earn a lot of extra money if you write at once for our beautiful samples and wonderful offer. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 285, Chicago.

\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

TAILORING AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY COUNTY to sell guaranteed tailor-made clothes. We will ship free of charge a large merchants sample outfit showing 200 samples at \$22.50 and up. Write today and become our exclusive agent in your town. Jay Rose & Co., Dept. B, 415 S. Wells St., Chicago.

AGENTS: SELL NEVERFAIL IRON RUST AND STAIN REMOVER. Huge profits. Big line. Sample. Write today. Sanford-Beal Co., Inc., Dept. A, Newark, N. Y.

AGENTS—\$40 TO \$100 A WEEK. Free Samples. Gold and silver Sign Letters for stores and office windows. Anyone can put them on. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431-H, N. Clark, Chicago.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Rasdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—LARGE MANUFACTURER WANTS AGENTS to sell hosiery, underwear, shirts, dresses, skirts, waists, shoes, clothing, etc. Write for free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

Mexican Diamonds Flash Like Genuine. fool experts, stand tests, yet sell for 1-50th the price. Few live Agents wanted to sell from handsome sample case. Big profits, pleasant work. Write today. Mexican Diamond Imp't. Co., Box 88, Las Cruces, N. Mexico.

AGENTS—YOU CAN GET A BEAUTIFUL FAST COLOR ALL WOOL "MADE-TO-MEASURE" SUIT without a cent of expense. Write Lincoln Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 25, Chicago, Ill., for their liberal suit offer.

SEND 2c POSTAGE for free sample with particulars. No splashing water strainers. Easy seller. Returns big. Experience unnecessary. Seed Filter Co., N 73 Franklin St., New York.

PANTS \$1.00, SUIT \$3.75, MADE TO MEASURE. For even a better offer than this write and ask for free samples and new styles. Knickerbocker Tailoring Co., Department 540, Chicago, Ill.

HELP WANTED

RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTORS EARN FROM \$110 TO \$200 per month and expenses. Travel if desired. Unlimited advancement. No age limit. We train you. Positions furnished under guarantee. Write for Booklet CM 30. Standard Business Training Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

WRITE NEWS ITEMS AND SHORT STORIES for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

HELP WANTED—FFMALE

BECOME DRESS DESIGNERS—MAKERS. Earn \$150 month up. Women—girls, 15 up. Fascinating, easy work. Sample lessons free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. B904, Rochester, N. Y.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

Send \$1

Fit
Absolutely
Guaranteed



Send
Cou-
pon
for
FREE
Style
Book

Get a Stylish Made-to-Order Suit or Overcoat

Men—look here! No need for you to wear ready mades. No need for you to stand for high prices and pay all the money down for made-to-measure clothes.

America's big tailor shop will make you a suit or overcoat of fine fabric in latest style to your exact measure, guarantee the fit and send it on approval for \$1 down. Get our big Style Book and see for yourself that we are world beaters on style, quality, reasonable prices and liberal terms. The free Style Book explains our plan and shows how you get the snappiest styles and save money. Cloth samples also sent free.

5 Months to Pay

Your credit is good here. We trust you. Wear the suit or overcoat while paying for it. No risk to you. If not satisfied return the clothes and we refund your \$1. That shows that our garments and work must be best—otherwise we could not make such an offer. Could any house be more liberal?

Save \$15 to \$25

Yes, you keep \$15 to \$25 (or more) in your pocket when you order a suit or overcoat from us. See our stunning styles and classy tailoring and learn how to save a lot of money. Get in on this now, and save that cash for yourself. You send only \$1 and your measurements and tell us which cloth you want. We make the suit and ship quick—no delays. Send clothes back if not all or more than you expect.

Send Coupon for FREE Style Book

Send for your copy of our wonderful FREE Style Book. Shows pictures of latest styles in men's made-to-measure clothing and a big collection of fine cloth samples to select from. Mail coupon, letter or postal to-day—no charge—no obligation whatever. Don't put this off.

Stanley-
Rogers Co.
1015 Jackson Blvd.,
Dept. 827, Chicago

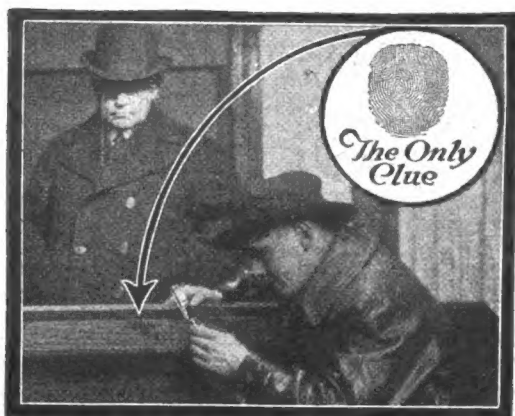
Please send me FREE your new Style Book showing latest Metropolitan Styles, also Cloth Samples and full particulars of your \$1 down with Five-Months-To-Pay Offer.

Name.....

Address.....

Town..... State.....

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.



\$500 REWARD for TWO HOURS WORK

It was in answer to a request from the Chief of Police that Warren Biglow, the Finger Print Expert, arrived at the scene of the daring robbery of the T—O— Company offices. The job was undoubtedly the work of skilled cracksmen and robbers of uncommon nerve. \$6,500 in currency—the company payroll—was gone. Not a single apparent clue had been found by the police.

Almost immediately after his arrival Biglow turned his attention to a heavy table which had been tipped up on its side. Examination of the glossy mahogany showed an excellent set of finger prints. The thief might just as well have left his calling card.

To make a long story short his prints were photographed and taken to Central Office, where they were matched with those of "Big Joe" Moran, a safe blower well known to the police. Moran was subsequently caught and convicted on Biglow's testimony and finger-print proof. Most of the money was recovered. In the meantime the T—O— Company had offered a \$500 reward, which was given to Biglow—his pay for two hours' work.

Be a Finger-Print Expert Learn at Home in Spare Time

Could you imagine more fascinating work than this? Often life and death depend upon the decisions of finger-print evidence—and big rewards go to the EXPERT. Thousands of trained men are now needed in this great field. The finger-print work of governments, corporations, police departments, detective agencies and individuals has created a new profession. Many experts regularly earn from \$2,000 to \$5,000 a year in this fascinating game. And now you can easily learn the secrets of this new Science in your spare time—at home. Any man with common school education and average ability can become a Finger Print Expert in a surprisingly short time.

FREE Finger-Print Outfit and Large Illustrated Book

For a limited time we are making a special offer of a complete Professional Finger Print outfit, absolutely free and also a Free Course in Secret Service Intelligence. Mastery of these two kindred professions will open a brilliant career for you. Write quickly for fully illustrated free book on Finger Prints which explains this wonderful training in detail. Don't wait until this offer has expired—mail the coupon now. You may never see this announcement again! Address

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCE
Dept. C-107 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Ill.

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCE
Dept. C-107, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: Without any obligation whatever send me your new, fully illustrated, FREE book on Finger Prints and your offer of a free course in Secret Service Intelligence.

Name.....Age.....

Address.....

Town.....State.....

ANY STYLE \$3.48
PANTS NOW
Send money
Made to Your Order
Biggest Value Ever Offered

Beautiful pants to your order, of fine quality striped worsteds, through and through weaves for dress or business, guaranteed to give you two solid years satisfying wear or MONEY BACK, tailored any style or size—No Extra Charges—parcel post or express prepaid. **Biggest \$8.00 value ever offered or money back.** Write for 60 cloth samples, **FREE SPECIAL THIRTY DAY TRIAL OFFER, one \$3.48** Fair to a customer

Make Big MONEY You can earn \$25 to \$50 a week sending orders for your relatives and friends. Your spare time will do. **COMPLETE OUT-FIT** and simple directions in first mail—FREE.

33.48
Buy
\$8.00
Pants
Send your name—TODAY.

Chicago Tailors Ass'n 515 S. Franklin St. Chicago
Dept. H649

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money-making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., are wanted for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss. to the Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

WANTED—Poems for publication for magazine of Inspiration and Practical Help to young writers. Send Mss. to the Post's Magazine, Room 101, 916 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago.

WRITERS: HAVE YOU A POEM, STORY OR PHOTOPLAY TO SELL? Submit MMS. at once to Music Sales Company, Dept. 60, St. Louis, Mo.

WANTED: COMPOSERS OF VERSE OR MUSIC to write at once. Brilliant opportunity for good talent. Address, Burrell Van Buren, 126 Grand Opera House, Chicago.

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalog. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS PROCURED—TRADE MARKS REGISTERED—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing ideas free on request. Richard B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 22783 Woolworth Bldg., New York.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for Free Illustrated Guide Book and Evidence of Conception Blank. Send Model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

WANTED TO BUY

MAIL DIRECT TO THE REFINERS
ANY OLD GOLD, silver, magneto points, old watches, diamonds, platinum, old or broken jewelry, false teeth, gold or silver ores or nuggets, War Bonds and Stamps. Send them to us to-day. Highest prices paid in cash by return mail. Goods returned in 10 days if you're not satisfied. The Ohio Smelting & Refining Co., 254 Lennox Bldg., Cleveland, O.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

ADVERTISING SECTION.



"Good Bye, Boys!"

"Today I dropped in for a last word with the boys at the office. And as I saw Tom and Dave there at the same old desk it came to me suddenly that they had been there just so the day I came with the firm four years ago.

"When I started here I was put at a desk and given certain routine things to do. It was my first job and I took it as a matter of course. But after a few months I began to realize that I was nothing but a human machine—doing things that anyone could do and that I couldn't expect to advance that way.

"So I had a talk with the manager and I'll never forget what he said. 'If you want to get ahead, put in some of your spare time getting special training along the line of your work. We want men who care enough about their future not only to do their work well but to devote part of their spare time to preparation for advancement.'

"That very night I wrote to Scranton and a few days later had started studying evenings at home. Why, do you know, it gave me a whole new interest in our business? In a few months I was given more important work and more money. Since then I've had three increases, six months ago I was put in charge of my department, and now my big chance has come—I'm to be manager of our Western branch at \$5,000 a year!

"Tom and Dave could never see any sense in my studying nights—they said eight hours was enough for any man to be bothered with business. They had the same chance I had—they could have been big men in the firm today. But they stood still while I went up to one of the best jobs in our business. It just shows what spare time training will do."

Every day men who have let the International Correspondence Schools help them are moving up to more responsible positions and bigger salaries. Clerks have become advertising, sales and business managers; mechanics have become foremen, superintendents and engineers; carpenters have become architects and contractors; men and boys have risen from nothing at all to splendid positions of responsibility—because in spare hours at noon and at night they have learned to do some one thing well.

If you want to make more money, show your employer you're trying to be worth more money. If you want a bigger job, show him you're willing to prepare for it.

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

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NUMBER 3

Jungle Love by Raymond Lester

Author of "Dust to Dust," "Walls of Clay," the Nan Russell series, etc.

CHAPTER I.

JULIE BECKONS TO OPPORTUNITY.

JULIE SOMERS was absorbed in unusually close and intensive thought. Dark, upcurved, and pleasingly thick lashes veiled her downcast eyes; but it should be known they were blue, very beautiful and, emotionally, very unexpressive and misleading. In a mental close-up of inner vision, Julie was looking again at a wrist watch. It was an oddly shaped trinket, oblong and quite different to the common run of timekeepers. It had cost a lot of money, and the wrist it adorned belonged to a girl with astonishingly blond hair. More of her anon.. At present she figures only as a shadowy being in Julie's reflections.

Offhand, these same may be classed as being kin to the small potato family; but commonplace seed-tubers are at times of vast importance. They sprout, flower, and multiply and bear—new potatoes.

The clang and rattle of the car's wheels over the vibrating rails of the column-supported Elevated intruded not at all upon Julie's consciousness. Night and morning for months of workdays she had taken that same short journey. Down-town at 8.45 A.M. Up-town at round about 6 P.M.

For her there was no novelty or remotest tingle of excitement in the swaying, grating rumble of the train as it took the curves. She felt no discomfort in the elbows that jogged her. No irritation at the crowd that jostled, and she paid no heed, either, to the casual glances of the women, or the more inquiring looks of some of the men. The bi-daily trip, Sundays and holidays excepted, was a standardized detail in her existence. She didn't like the journey, but on the other hand it didn't bother her overmuch. Anyway, at this moment of meeting her, Julie was in a mood of total disregard of external circumstances. She was thinking, groping; striving to concentrate and form the germ of a philosophy of life.

Lots of us are this way inclined. In fact, several of us are old-timers, and have a multiplicity of philosophies to fit the needs of the moment. A most accommodating style of mentality this; but not conducive to sincerity.

However—to Julie Somers. For her, the merest glimmer of a preconceived plan of life was a unique experiment. Her fluffy, untenacious little brain was hard put to it to hang closely to the idea that had struck her. Up until this interesting moment her mental processes had been exercised in consideration of so-and-so's chewing gum.

Some had more flavor, but went off to a fawn, gooey unsatisfactoriness sooner than others. That new kind didn't tickle the palate quite so alluringly at the initial bite, but it had a lasting punch. Julie knew, because she had timed the masticatory procedure from the first snap of her small, white teeth, until the moment came for parking it under her desk top; wallside to the left. In some respects Julie was methodical and thorough, and it should not be rashly thought that she was a freak or an exception in the poverty or paucity of her food for reflection at odd moments. Plenty of others are prone to self hypnosis and mental magnetic attachment to grains of chaff and millstones.

Opposite Julie sat a man who for the past three years had been trying to make up his mind whether he should give up secret drinking or his business. He did not want to give up his sly tipping, so his future was easy to foresee. On Julie's left was a huge, grossly obese woman whose every meal-time was a torture of regret and a conflict between her natural constitution and appetite. How could she eat pork, potatoes, candies, ice-cream, and other flesh and fat fertilizers without putting on weight? Her problem was how to be a thin glutton.

Standing by the sliding door was a florid, discontented-looking broker whose financial deals ran into hundreds of thousands of dollars every month. His august presence near Julie was due to a breakdown of his imported car; but his disagreeable expression was not caused by having to journey on the "L." His trouble and obsession were connected with his inability to grow hair where he wanted it. As lusty weeds do grow, it thrived on cheeks and chin; and excepting for a brief respite immediately following a close shave, always did his seeking fingers stroke a purplish, raspy skin. He shaved twice a day. In three months he could have grown a beard a foot long. On his head was a scalp that no wild Indian would have coveted as a trophy. There was nothing to catch hold of. So it goes, most of us have some pet fly in our ointment and—there it sticks.

Others there are, who unsung by popular

acclaim, determinedly nurture in their hearts some dear hope, and carry unseen the cross of self-sacrifice. They are holders of jeweled scepters and often rule unknown. Humble may be their station in life; but quite unaware of their spiritual glory, they are members of a host of uncanonized saints.

Hard by the noted owner of the bald pate was an old lady in rusty black. Her skimping and scraping, her life of penny guarding and self-denial, had left its mark upon her. She was tired and worn looking; but the son born to her in her late thirties had climbed and was still going upward to success. Body and mind she had nourished him, watched over and guarded him. Now the cost was written in her faded eyes, the furrows on her brow, the lines about her firm, pale lips; but she was happy. Her soul was at peace within her.

Other matters that had come up for consideration before the personal, directing likes and dislikes of Julie, had been the choice between a comfortable bedroom with a South aspect—and closet with running water, at seven dollars a week, and serviceable, but cotton stockings; or a four by ten hall-room overlooking a dismal, junk littered back yard at three fifty and—real silk hosiery.

The silk stockings won the argument without any fuss of delay. Like uncoated pills, and getting up early for work, sensible and serviceable things are nasty and too often made unattractive. A pill, a real up-to-date pill is candy-coated; but compulsory early rising remains just as irksome to some lie-abeds as it did before pills were camouflaged.

Thus, on the theory that it is harder to tumble out of a comfortable seven-dollar-a-week bed than a lumpy contraption of squeaky springs and shaky legs; and backing up her argument with the certain knowledge that she would not be able to afford a breakfast in keeping with a South aspect, Julie's trim ankles went to and fro from rooming-house to office, in silk. In preference to a wholesome plate of soup and a hunk of bread for lunch, Julie spent an extra dime and had a prettily decorated, nice tasting sundae and cake. If she had

two pieces of cake on Monday or Tuesday, some other day of that week she had to go without. What with this, that, and other reprehensible extravaganc^{ies} allied to silk stockings, Julie was always broke before the boy came round with her pay envelope at three o'clock Fridays. But if her hats and her shoes, shirt-waists and—oh, well, all of the trimmings that even a poor but honest working girl feels the need; if all these tended to produce an effect of over smartness, Julie never looked untidy or hard up. And such is the vitality of youth, it did not appear that her body lacked the vitamins and calories we are supposed to have—or fade.

On Saturdays Julie swung her typewriter cover over at two sharp, and went shopping until six, and if she found a bargain at a dollar ninety-eight, she certainly earned it. Bring forth the man who will tramp the department-stores for three hours and more to save fourteen cents on the price of a shirt, or seven on a pair of socks. Maybe his limit for a hat is two dollars and a half, and he'd like to get it for less; but he won't go eye-shopping. It is pure good luck if mister man walks into a store and captures a bargain in headgear at two 'thirty-five, and even so, the chances are that when he gets home he finds he has a moth-eaten lid. A woman will hunt and stretch ten dollars to the purchasing power of fifteen, and—she won't buy a pig in a poke. A man? Well, he sometimes has a real-estate bargain thrown at him, or he dreams that copper is going up and blindly follows a hunch, he cleans up or is cleaned out. The gods of chance dispose; but how often does he owe his first little bit of capital for investment or speculation to his wife's so-called petty habit of bargain hunting?

Not all women use this flair for stalking sales and haunting remnant counters to the end of sequestering an accumulation of bits for a rainy day, or for the benefit of an improvident, much amused husband. Some of them are prodded to the chase by sheer poverty or an overweening infatuation for things pretty and stylish, and Julie Somers was one of these. The reflex from the war had made her shopping a more arduous job than ever. Of course there were still bar-

gains to be found; but they were not among the sensibly pretty and dainty feminine necessities. The real finds were among the expensive, superflously rich in material and elaborate in design and finish. The low-priced shirt-waists were dear at three dollars; but a slightly marred confection in medium quality silk and embroidered with beads could be bought for nine fifty—marked down from fifteen. A bargain for a girl with money to spend lavishly. The tax on luxuries did not help Julie in her search for finery. It seemed to her that everybody had money enough to flock to purchase the stores' best and thus keep prices up and limit her choice in things that could be bought at a moderate price.

"I wish I'd quit my job at the office and gone as a munition worker while I had the chance. Guess I'd have a bit laid by now," had more than once been Julie's expressed regret.

She had no accumulation of funds to draw upon, and urged by a pathetic ambition to make a show, she stinted herself in comfort and much preferred the fripperies of life to the solids. One good square meal, having a thick, juicy steak as a *pièce de resistance*, would have spoiled the look of a two-dollar bill. A week's lunches! A pair of stout-soled, low-heeled shoes would have cost half the price and lasted twice as long as her favored, high-arched patent pumps. Stupid extravagance, and perniciously unhygienic, opines the flat-footed matron who in her youth probably squeezed her internal organs into an eighteen-inch corset, and coveted her neighbor's dolman—whatever that may have been.

Naturally, being so superior in our conduct of our own affairs, we know Julie was all wrong in her sense of values, and woefully inferior to a practical-minded business girl; but, as all of us have not had the same disadvantages in education and upbringing, our subject under trial cannot altogether be held responsible or censured too severely.

Julie had, in common with other girls, a mother; but for all practical purposes of good moral guidance by precept and example, she was orphaned. As for her father, he had died before her perceptions began to make permanent records on the

scroll of her memory, and it may, without undue brutality, be stated that Mrs. Somers would have done better by her daughter if she too had shuffled off this mortal coil. Had this freakish mother gone earlier out of Julie's life, before the girl had reached the age when a child begins to wonder and ask simple, searching questions, Julie might have been left some tender memories, some character-building conceptions founded on others' testimony in praise of the sweetest tie a child is usually endowed with.

But, although motherhood is the star of hope in the travails of this world, not all women are in love with their natural vocation. The snappy, nasty tale of Mrs. Somers' sordid, frivolous selfishness need not here be detailed, for it is three years since she decamped and abandoned Julie to the magnificent independence concomitant with the princessly wage of twelve bucks per. And—Mrs. Somers is not coming back. The wistful look that will now and again pop into Julie's eyes, the tear she may sometimes let fall, the dangers she will meet, make no call to the love-void and sentiment-shriveled thing that pumps the blood through this mother's veins, so the requiem in her career is here and now cheerfully announced. Let an absent cat prow!

During the time we have been nodding our heads, raising our eyebrows and peeping into the intimate, family affairs of Julie, the motorman has switched on the juice and jerked the train out of Eighth Street station. Julie gets off at Fourteenth, she is nearing her destination and still clinging to the thought that set agoing all this discussion about her.

The pivotal center of her ruminations is a careless if defiant and pregnant phrase she overheard in the office. Somehow the nicely framed cards hung on the walls and preaching wise mottoes and maxims relative to business efficiency, did not appeal to Julie; but these few spoken words remained in her mind. They were whispered by the georgette crepe waisted, scarlet-lipped blonde whose super-manicured, beringed fingers had the temporary honor of typing the bosses letters. She it was who wore the wrist watch.

"When you're dead, you're dead! So—"

Eight words apostrophized to six with— a pause at the end. Miss Blonde had rounded off her uncompleted sentence with a debonair shrug of her shapely shoulders. "So—" she had said, and the flashing glance of her pencil-shaded, bright eyes had clearly indicated to Julie that she could fill in the gap according to her own desires and pleasures.

"When you're dead, you're dead. So—"

What should be the culmination of the glib catch phrase? At the first hearing the silly obviousness of the statement preceding the blonde's make what you like of it, "So—" had held no pull to Julie's attention; but attracted by the possibilities conveyed by the blonde's eloquently suggestive stop, Julie had reconsidered the so often fatally misleading words upholding the stupendously mischievous fallacy that death means the complete and utter extinction of spiritual as well as physical being.

"When you're dead, you're dead for sure," decided Julie as the train showed its tail buffers to Eighth Street. And, being rather sick of pinching, and typing thousands of letters beginning: In reply to your favor of the —th or —teenth inst., she nibbled at a tinselly philosophy that piquantly and quite easily tacked itself onto the conclusive—"So—"

The blonde's salary was little more than Julie's; yet she had hinted with easy familiarity of chicken a la—, roof gardens, limousines and orchids, week end and wine parties. The other girls talked about her in hushed voices and—some envied her good times, her ultra smart clothes, and her boisterous, fine air of independence.

Moral integrity and strength of adherence to a right and noble principle, is no inborn, instinctive gift. Rectitude is a cultivated habit nursed by environment, nourished by example, and bulwarked by an intelligently reasoned self-respect. Julie Somers had no anchor bedded in the good-holding ground of a mother's loving care; no mooring except a conventional and hap-hazard hold-on every-day, none too fascinating and rather threadbare usage and customs. So, feeling that she was being trod upon, not getting a fair deal, and hav-

ing Miss Blonde in mind, she asked herself:

"So — why worry, why bother? So — why not have a good time?"

Why not cut loose from a cramped, irksome existence? Did opportunities lack?

What then did the covert glances of youthfully dressed and rascally old satyrs spell? They showed no cloven hoof or forked tail, and no horns adorned their barbered heads. Was there any real penalty in expanding to their bland, inviting smiles? Was not the acceptance of a little dinner and so on the usual thing with the blonde? Were not nice surprises in the form of furs, a classy wrist watch, and midnight entertainments as generously tendered to a blue-eyed, silky-headed brunette, as to a bleached blonde? Could not Julie herself put behind her the days of stint and satisfy her craving for the delusive joys money can buy?

Luxurious ripe fruits, juicy and tempting, are pictured as pouring in an inexhaustible stream from the horn of plenty; but we have seen eye-captivating Bartletts of tinted soap, and desirable-looking Concord grapes of blown, empty bubbles and painted, synthetic bloom. Broadened in scope a little, the warning: *Stop, look, and listen*, applies to other dangers beside those that wait upon criminally rash speed hogs at level crossings.

A tiny shiver ran down Julie's back, her fingers played nervously with her hand-bag. She examined it contemplatively. It was prettily beaded. Saving up to buy it had deprived her of a multitude of other articles. To get one thing always meant the sacrifice of another. Under ordinary circumstances, what did the future hold for her? More years of grinding at the machine and then—

"Fourteenth Street," shouted the conductor, and before the pressure of the brakes had brought the train to a stop, Julie made her choice. She didn't put it into words, and still less did she know that the frame of mind she had adopted was to lead her far, far afield. She was ripe for mischief, reckless and ready to make her maiden obeisance to — clandestine opportunity.

Right at the foot of the Fourteenth Street stairs—it was waiting for her.

CHAPTER II.

ARTIE OPPORTUNE, ESQ.

NOT by a score or more the first to leave the train, Julie Somers reached the top of the stairs well ahead of the hurrying crowd disgorged to seek their several ways. Julie had rather a fussy way of walking, she wriggled her narrow shoulders and took short, mincing steps; but by a series of quick darts and more than one unceremonious shove, she passed her competitors. There was no purpose, no defined object for her haste, no malice in her rudeness. There could not be, for Julie didn't know it is vulgar to shove, rude to push. Hurry, scurry for no cause or purpose was an unconscious, mechanical habit, that was all. It is not ungeneral.

Down the first flight she pattered, her high heels clicking, her eyes roaming. She looked bright, intelligent, and might have been taking interest and pleasure in the ten hundred and one attractions of the avenue. Below her as she tripped across the bridge there lumbered a load of fragrant hay. A cream enameled monster, twelve cylinder monarch of miles and speed on the great highways that ribbon valleys and skirt mountains, purred softly, sedately by. A girl in a scarlet sweater, poppy like on a field of drab ran across the street. A slouch-footed, furtive-eyed boy carried a basket of roses crucified to sticks. All these and more did Julie's eyes look down upon, and she saw—nothing. No image was registered in her brain, no record made upon her memory. She looked as if she perceived, as if the joy of life was in her; but in reality her mind, to which the eyes are but windows, was a blank to all but herself. Unlucky because she had never known friendship; unmoral for she could not spiritually discriminate between the moral and immoral. Purity, equally with viciousness, is a matter of habit, education, and a probing sense of comparative values.

Julie was atune only to certain impressions. One of these made itself manifest

and claimed attention at the foot of the stairs. Its name was Falwell. Arthur Falwell, or to be more familiar and nomenclatively descriptive: Artie Falwell. He was opportunity, so—we at once think we know what is going to follow; but we don't, for we cannot forestall the future until we can read the past, and that is gone; gone far beyond our reach into the limbo where things that happened yesterday look so different to-day.

In some degree, Julie Somers, her *mise en scene*; her lay-out, as it were, have been accounted for. She has come, more or less slowly, it is true, unerringly to the appointed place; but, Artie? Where does he spring from? We shall find this out presently, and why he deliberately stepped in front of Julie and raised his jaunty, gray Fedora. Also it may be discoverable why he was the chosen one selected by the gods of cause and effect to fitness of Julie's mood. Why he was to lead this girl from Fourteenth Street to a land where an orange-red bird warbles a song that causes a listener to pause and wait—for the end that never comes. Always is the finishing note left—unsung.

The bow that accompanied Artie's salute served two purposes: Julie was detained sufficiently long to have her attention fully awakened. She observed the smooth sleekness of the stranger's dark hair, the nifty cut of his clothes, the rings he wore, the diamond-and-pearl stickpin that nestled in the folds of his silk scarf, the gold and platinum chain looped and swaying gently across his vest. Here was quality, elegance, and the nonchalant ease portrayed by the smart and dapper young men who self-consciously lounged across the ad pages testifying to the positive necessity that all "comers" should be attired in Mumm and Mumm's clothes. The other purpose served, was the more important one: Artie had a good chance to say his little piece relative to, "Haven't I met you before, Miss Smith?" and conclusively break the icy reserve that is supposed to encompass all young girls when accosted by an unknown young man.

There is a curious, linking logic, and sometimes rapid sequence in succession of

apparently unrelated events. Until he stopped Julie at Fourteenth Street, Artie had no knowledge of her existence, and not the remotest connection with our Miss Blonde. Yet Julie had been ready to greet him because he was associated in her mind with the tow-haired one's remark. This rather suggests that heedless tongue-wagglers are more dangerous than carriers of flu germs. They are.

It is just on the cards that if Miss Blonde had not made that cogent remark, Julie might have tipped her chin and pertinently suggested that Artie was decidedly what all eggs are not. With not a little ill-concealed pride, she would for many days have told the tale of her so-common adventure and virtuously anathemized "that fresh guy."

As it was, the bitter-sweet of the blonde's poison dart had seeped into the girl's take-a-chance spirit of adventuresomeness, and with her face partly uplifted to Artie's admiring gaze, Julie dimpled and remarked:

"M' name's not Smith. It's—it's Somers. Julie Somers."

With a proper shade of gratitude for the kind acceptance of his worn-out, subterfugal addressing phrase, Artie responded with the name we already know him by, and introductions were complete. Artie had a number of other names, some more plebeian, and others of a more distinguished character; but to us he remains Artie Falwell.

With just enough hesitation to be complimentary, Artie tucked his hand lightly under the girl's elbow and guided her round the corner and across the street. They faced in the direction of Broadway.

As they passed a candy-store, Julie glanced back over her shoulder. In the throng weaving about the news-stand under the "L" stairs, she glimpsed a figure standing stock still and staring. With a nervous shake of her head and a meaningless giggle, Julie refused Artie's pressing offer of light refreshment, and forged ahead.

Arthur Falwell made no comment; but a look of doubt came into his eyes. Under pretext of lighting a cigarette, he turned and looked to see if they were being followed. He saw nothing alarming, no pursuing figure, no prospect of trouble.

Speculative prowling, plus a discriminating eye for feather-brained girls of pleasing physical charms had induced him to try his luck with Julie; but he had no intention of getting into a two-fisted row with a man. No doughty, once-aboard-the-lugger-and-the-gurl-is-mine, great white way filibuster, was this modern squire of opportunity-sown damsels. Artie loved his pickings and sneakings of marketable valuables and cheap pleasures; but with all his appetites and cleverness, he was only a poor lickspittle of sin, afraid of the consequences of his calculated stunts. A crook all the time; a kiss-and-run-away, tinpanny *romé* was Artie in his lighter moments.

If at that moment there had appeared any pursuing sequel to Julie's backward glance, Artie would have taken the first turn to the right and beaten it. He adventured—carefully. Julie, far less well equipped to steer a safe course or even pretend to hold the rudder of destiny, was careless by inexperience.

Assured that all was well, Artie ranged alongside the girl, and chatting with pleasant ease soon smoothed her ruffled feathers. Chickens are notoriously irrational and scary creatures, and Artie put down that backward glance to some imagined and obscure fancy.

"S'pose we take a little ride," he suggested, "those pretty feet of yours were not meant for pounding sidewalks," and added as he read the fluttering indecision on the girl's face. "We'll go to the Mogolia, have a snack to eat and—get acquainted. Of course you've been to the old Mog?"

Of course Julie had not; but rather than betray her ignorance of what must be a gorgeous palace of delight, she nodded a sharp affirmative.

Without actually pledging herself to an avowed intention of breaking away from the dull rut of routine and jumping boldly into an incarnadined future, Julie wanted to sip, to taste the golden, bubbling wine chaliced in the phrase: "Having a good time."

Even if she had known the Mogolia was a tawdry, gilded web where man-beasts jazzed and wishy-washy vamps mingled

sneering with tenderfoot neophytes like herself, Julie would probably have gone just the same.

CHAPTER III.

MINDS OF THE GREAT.

ARTIE hailed a taxi, and right away bestowed a new experience on the girl and—she felt safer. There was no chance now of her being followed. Her big, blue eyes stole a sidelong glance at her companion. As symbolizing easy opportunity, he looked quite harmless. Quite attractive, indeed. Opportune Artie; how well he suited the unweighed need of the moment. He was no blue serge, shiny-elbowed tightwad, neither was he a pot-bellied, ugly old sport. You bet he knew how to treat a girl. He was no piker. He knew his way about and—didn't he talk nice?

"Fell for you right off the bat, I did," said Artie. "Gee, but I was scared stiff you'd hand me the fadeaway. Reckon I'm in luck to meet up with a looker like you. Bet you the bunch at the Mog 'll open their eyes some, I'll tell the world. What say we take in a show later on?"

"How you do talk," giggled Julie.

"Sure," agreed Artie. "Quick talk and quick action's my motter. No sense in wasting time. Life's too short."

"O-oh!"

The girl's exclamation was but an involuntary murmur, but Artie pounced on it.

"What?" he asked.

"Nothing. That is, nothing much. I was just thinking, that's all."

"Thinking!" Artie pondered this for a moment. Girls who thought were hardly in his line. The brilliance of his smile toned down a bit. His glance showed a trifle of distrust. Had he made a mistake in his estimation of this girl? Was she after all a mollycoddle, a prude? You never could tell with some of 'em. Sometimes the smart lookers were dubs, and sometimes the dubs were the fly birds. A feller never could be quite sure. Artie looked at Julie's mouth. He was no physiognomist or an analyst of character writ in

shadows; but the soft mobility of the girl's lips, the all but babyish dimples at the corners of her mouth, sufficed to reassure him. Still, he sought for oral confirmation that her "thinking" was not at variance with his own sweet pleasure.

"You were thinking?" he prompted.

"About something a friend told me. What you said made me remember it again."

"What I said? What was that?"

Artie began to wonder if he had made a slip, but was soon reassured.

"About life being too short," explained Julie.

"What about it? 'S'right, ain't it? That is, if you want to have a good time you have to go out and get it on the hop. That's what I say."

"That's what she said, only in other words."

"What was they?"

"When you're dead, you're dead. So—"

"So—get all the fun you can while you're young," finished Artie. "Sure. That's the dope. Your friend was all to the mustard."

"I think so, too," agreed Julie. "Funny you and her should both say the same in a different way."

"Oh, I dunno," said Artie, stifling a yawn. "I reckon she's a girl of sense. Knows a thing or two. Same as yours truly. Leave it to me, though, I'm the boy to show you more'n she can tell you. They put the lid on in this old town, but they couldn't get us all in the pot. The Mog don't advertise, but it's sure some slap-up ho-tel. They put up over a hundred thousand on the café fixings alone. You know that."

This was sheer, blatant bluff-flattery of Julie, but she took it for granted that her sprightly companion meant his implication that she was a girl of wide and varied experience."

"Oh, go on!" she exclaimed. "I'm only a poor stenog. I ain't been nowhere. Not much, that is."

"All right, blue eyes," retorted Artie with a pleasing suggestion of disbelief. "We won't fall out about it."

When the taxi turned off Broadway, and

stopped in a quiet, respectable-appearing side street, only the fact that Julie stood silent kept her from openly betraying her ignorance of the Mogolia. There was nothing in sight that suggested their proximity to an ho-tel with a hundred-thousand-dollar café. Artie made no spoken observation on the transparent truth of the matter. It suited him to allow Julie to believe she had really convinced him she was accustomed to high life and its attendant freedom from restraint.

"The more she kids herself she's got me going, the more she's got to play up to," he thought with the facile reasoning of gutter-bred parasites.

It was early when Julie and Artie entered the Mogolia Café, and the freely cash-spending parties of transient pilgrims to this place of unpleasantness but to all seeming, toothsome contrast to decently conducted hotels, had not yet arrived.

Taking the rough with the smooth, the flower with the thorn, the world is a mighty good place to stand upon. Its natural beauties are legion, its plague spots rare, and notwithstanding some mulish persistence in the ways that are a clog in the wheel of progress, civilization is on the upgrade. But it is peculiar that man will take the trouble to build a fine city and allow to be planked down there a million-dollar house of septic pestilence. The suppositional answer is that a rascal's money has to make money in rascally ways.

The Mogolia was an instance. Owned by a rogue and run by rogues, it was supported with the money of rogues and fools. They provided the interest on the boss rascal's investment. Tainted money calls to its kind. Artie had money. A lot of it. Ill-gotten and thereby, evil. Julie was a simpleton, nice enough to look at, but short on furnishings in the Chamber of Common Sense. Heaps of girls and boys, light-hearted, bubble-brained babes of seventeen, up to the getting old and passing young grades, are that way, and some of them never do start in to collect any of Old Man Experience's curios. Not even on the hire system. As for Julie, she is so very young that she may, one day, know the fear that angels have.

Present only in the café was the stained scum that froths on cities' human tides. Young men whose youth was dead, old men whose eyes were sepulchers of unforgettable things, and—smiling, smiling women who cluttered the divans and lounged at tables. Some of the men, not yet totally submerged, sat moody and silent facing their smiling partners of the passing moment. Others tossed back with meaning grins the women's empty words, and others told whispered tales.

A faint ripple of curious interest, such as stirs and throbs beneath some stagnant pool when a vagrant, bright-winged butterfly falls and cloy its delicate body with slime, passed among the scattered habitués of the Mog café de luxe as Julie trotted after Artie to the section of the big room reserved for diners.

Sly-featured, servile waiters, chosen by the management to suit the patrons they served, pussy-footed together in twos and threes to exchange opinions and bandy-worn, unclean jests. Here and there a man nodded a greeting, wigwagged a congratulation, or sneered with cynic jealousy. All was murmurous drone of the fish that came to their foul nets, and Julie was quite young and pretty. As for the women, their smiles remained fixed, but in some hard eyes showed a trace of part savage, part pitying contempt. In others was a dumb, blank indifference to this old, yet evergreen prelude to graduation in this sisterhood of smiling women. Yet, although more than one subdued, mirth-void, tinkling laugh broke through the place, there were girlishly dressed women there whose blistered hearts suffered still another searing reminder of what might have been, had they not followed the pied piper of loveless passions. A few there were who once had all but reached the haven of happiness, and being cast out had spiritually died and now—sat smiling. Bondaged slaves, too frail to ever rise again until they heard the call that would for all time remove them from their dreary place in the market. One there was also who half rose from her chair as Julie passed.

"Another," she murmured and sank back again to a languid pose of elegant ease

when the man facing her laughed coarsely and remarked:

"Nix on the buttinsky stuff, Leila. That guy ain't had his rake-off yet. Whadder you kid yourself for anyway?"

"But she is not—"

The man made a gesture of casual finality.

"She will be," he retorted. "She's here!" Then he commented critically. "Artie don't pick 'em dressy, but she's new. I'll say she is."

Tenderly as if he were oozening a fragile bit of thistledown, a big, clumsy-looking servitor wafted Julie into a chair set comfortably back to the curtains draping the raised orchestra platform. In appearance, the waiter's hands were red, coarse, hairy-backed hams; but in practise they were trained marvels of dexterity. He, like his fellows, was branded: Mog. He was a serving machine, and his all-weening obsession was tips. The small, cunning brain controlling his big body was wedded to the ambition of acquiring a monument to John Barleycorn by cornering enough chicken-feed and greenbacks. Some day that lord of forks and teaspoons was going back—back to his native land to cultivate a beer-garden. He was a Mog waiter, and very naturally his tip-congested brain was inevitable; but those flaccid muscles of his could have been used to better purpose than totting teacups and spreading napkins for bifurcated ghouls and satin-swathed sorceresses; but, and, well, an eight-pound sledge-hammer is rather heavy, and the fires of a steel furnace a bit too fierce for a flabby-spirited giant. Haying seated Julie where she can see the length and breadth of the café, Hamfist, being merely the flunkey in the picture, an accessory to the scene as it were, passes out of further consideration. Artie is the principal in the orbit of Julie's experiences, and supers must not be allowed to distract attention.

Following a brief but impressively confidential conference with the waiter, Artie Falwell leaned back in his chair and narrowly studied the girl. Julie, in her turn, would presently and more lightly do the same with Arthur; but just now the novelty of the scene, the splendor of the café, the

"air" of the well-dressed mob, the arrestingly gowned women took up all her time. By hearsay, Julie was aware that the Mogolia had a reputation, but never had she dreamed she herself would figure as a guest. She liked the reality. Mr. Falwell had brought her there. Therefore, Mr. Falwell was a prince. Meanwhile—

"She's got the lamps," decided Artie. "It's sure the little boob works. That's easy to bet on. Cheap get-up, but puts on a front. Kids herself some. Fell for the ain't-I-seen-you-before? stuff right off the bat. How's that? Am I stringing her or is she putting one over on me? Guess not. Them headlights is too dolly. She don't see nothin' but the diamonds and bright lights now. Guess she's been living most of her time in the dark. Who's her folks?"

An all-important, vital question this to gents of Artie's ilk; but in his slick appraisal of Julie's charms, Artie had failed to note the shape and length of her face from ear to chip-tip. Rounded contours, skin texture and absence of bunches of muscle often disguise basic and undeveloped qualities. There are masculine brows of seeming noble proportions that are domes of solid, mock ivory, or hollows of inanity. There are rosy, cupid-bowed lips that conceal a firmness of character greater than the mastodonic jaws of some of our generals of soap, beef, oil, and steel activities.

Having got Julie as far as the Mog, Arthur knew he was pretty nearly the arbiter of her near future. On him would depend much; but what he was going to do he didn't quite know. So far as the law went, the girl was evidently over the border-line of protection. There was no punishable crime committed in bringing her to a notorious café. Oh, no! She was mistress of her comings and goings. She might be a child in judgment, a tenderfoot in venturesomeness; but the law only covers the young in years. After that—well, legal protection does go further; but there are ways of dodging it. "Folks," such as big brothers, a hard-fisted father, a tenacious tigress of a mother; these were not so easily evaded if once they got on the war-path.

Artie found himself turning over a mess

of potentialities. Now—a closer view of Julie's youthfulness rather pleased, appealed to him, but—how about her folks? Before this matter could be cleaned up, the waiter deposited a tray on the table, and put a temporary period to Artie's cogitations.

On the tray was a teapot of fine ware adorned with a circlet of roses and bearing the Mog's monogram. There were cups and saucers to match, a sugar-basin, a cream-jug, and a bowl of neatly sliced lemons. The silverware shone as if it had never been used. One could say: tea in the English way or tea in the Russian style and expect fulfilment of either desire. There was cream and sugar or lemon, but—

CHAPTER IV.

SUB ROSA.

"PRETTY!" exclaimed Julie, and put the tip of her forefinger on the roses circling the teapot. "Why, it's cold!" she finished.

"Sh!" warned Artie with a wink that was meant to be indicative of a secret to be shared only by the few and trusted. "Sure it's cold, but it ain't tea. Looks better in dinky teacups all dolled up with flow'rs. Maybe you noticed they gave us the double O as we come through the lobby. They gotter be careful, and you bet they are, but now and again some crazy bug who can't look at a beer-bottle without getting soused, crawls in and the management have to dig to muffle the squeal he sets up. See? No one don't get in here without being O. K.'d by one of the reg'lers. By and by when there ain't no-casuals here, they won't bother about the teapots. Lemme help you."

The cocktail poured into Julie's cup was not of the finest rye and—its kick had a nauseating tang to it; but Artie liked it and the girl made believe she did, so everything was all right. Everybody satisfied, especially the Mog management. Illicit teapot cocktails represented a profit of somewhere about three thousand per cent which went a long way toward defraying the high cost of graft. It is allowable to say that if the

Mog owner had not been afraid of killing off nine-tenths of the geese who laid his golden eggs, he would have ordered all Manhattan and Martinis concocted of straight wood alcohol and burnt sugar, but it paid him better to keep them alive and coming and—they came. Like sheep after a salt lick they always follow the lure of the booze trail. They are the cocktail boys and girls, and some of them will soak the labels off a varnish can.

To the irresponsible and criminal, there is a flavor about breaking the law, a fascination about dives whether they be located in a down-town cellar or a pseudo hotel; and, although the decoction Julie managed to swallow nearly had the same effect as a dose of mustard and water, the girl smiled gratefully across the table at Artie. Her stomach rebelled and knew darn well it was not having anything like a fair deal or a good time, but its mistress thought she was, so, despite all protests, mind conquered over matter.

During dinner, which consisted mainly of a multiplicity of knives and forks and a succession of plates lightly burdened with edibles, but plentifully garnished, the orchestra started up, and Artie quizzed the girl concerning her folks. Julie romanced a little; spoke about a rich uncle whom she had never seen and who might one day designate her as his heiress, but in the main she spoke the truth. Artie pretended to believe the story about the oil-king uncle and flattered the girl with lavish gusto. It was a great relief to him to find that Julie had no relatives who would bother him. As the café began to fill with a Mog-censored, chattering crowd of vouched-for newcomers, the old hands livened up, the orchestra got going with louder abandon, and carelessness became the order of the hour. Julie's blue eyes, never noticeably dull or listless, brightened until they shone with an enervated spirit of delight.

No one, unless they be sterile of lighter mood or harnessed to jaundiced, jealous gloom, can legitimately deny us our periods of playtime in sunshine and moon-glow, or even the distraction of a steam-heated dance-hall. The tired business man, the staid housewife and grandpop, all like to

lapse to occasional foolishness, and whether their tastes run to active participation in the merry-go-round of Coney Island, or the more vicarious enjoyment of some gorgeous roof-garden, one can sincerely say: go to it, brothers and sisters. There may be the next-morning headache, but there won't be any clinging, nasty-tasting thoughts.

Too great an indulgence in spicy foods and mental thrills are conducive to all kinds of indigestion; but moral, contagious diseases have little inducement for growth in wide-open, public places. It is the screened and guarded hidden haunt that takes all the clean fun out of life. Vulture men and garbage-crow cannot thrive except in secrecy. Their setting must be a roadside or city-compassed Mog.

Happiness being a comparative emotion, on higher planes with some than with others, and constantly springing from different causes in the same person, Julie voiced the truth as she felt it, when she informed Artie that she was having *the* time of her life. It is nothing to be amazed about either; for what with the unaccustomed fumes in her head, the urging, now seductive, now riotous call of the music, the general atmosphere of insouciance, every nerve was atingle. No thought of yesterday or the morrow intruded. Every fiber of her being was vibrant to the surety she was all aboard for Joyville and traveling fast. She was living right in the moment and everything and everybody was *couléur de rose*. Her sky was the gilded ceiling, her horizon bounded by the walls of the café.

All the women about her became magically younger and prettier, all the men smarter and handsomer. They were a jolly, good-hearted bunch, all of them. Even Hamfist was nothing but a big, fat, good-humored genie of the feast. As for Artie? Well, there was no one to compare with him. He was the champion little ole gloom-chaser. It was a treat to watch him. Five, ten dollars to Artie was no more than a whiff of fragrant cigarette-smoke. Artie, the Mog, everything was lovely. So—as Artie would have remarked: "On with the dance, and to hell with the rest!"

Exactly. That is where the foolish and

the vicious always settle, and in person, the account against them. In tears, despair, or callous ignorance of sweeter things, they pay. Old Nick is a shylock *par excellence*, and often when he comes grinning to collect, there is no Portia to plead or defend.

Only one regret marred Julie's ecstatic frame of mind. She could not dance. Her meeting with Artie had been so sudden, so unexpected a fulfilment of her half-formed desire, her transition from Fourteenth Street to the Mog so rapid, that she had not had time to plan to go to her room and slip into her glad rags. Under her bed was a prized cardboard box. It contained an outfit for premeditated occasions; a nest-egg of attire suited to jaunts and high times. There were things pink and soft to touch. Frilly, tucked and diaphanous. The whole lot would have left room to spare if put into a man's hat, but in accordance with the prevailing skimpy mode, there was sufficient to adorn, if not to clothe, Julie. Also, for any exposed parts of her person there were suitable dressings such as powder and rouge. Carefully preserved in a creased scrap of silver paper was a small nubbin of greasy pomade the hue of crimson lake. This was the remains of one of Miss Blonde's lips-sticks. A prized relic of the great; an unguent salve, chemically dyed and perfumed with an odor of decayed rose petals. So far as concerned this evening, Julie's *trousseau de joie* was useless; but for this very reason she appeared at her best. Julie would not have agreed with this; but there were others beside Artie who saw in the rose-pink of her flushed cheeks, the clear red of her lips, and the childish eagerness of her glance, the signs of untarnished youth. In common with adolescent male cubs of sporty predilections Julie was proud to think she was a devil of a good fellow. She plumed herself on being sophisticated and as yet was no further in evil than a mischievous imp who peeks through the canvas of some circus side-show.

Among a gathering of *déclassé* free lances such as frequent the Mogs of the world, absence of the Cyprian taint is at once an attraction and a danger. No one was de-

ceived except the girl herself; and she, well satisfied with her perverted and glamor-bound view-point, did not bother herself to look beneath the surface. Life-takers are punishable by election to the chair of sinister power, and restraint is exercised toward the suicide by knife, gun, chemical, noose, and what not; but the subtle assassin of morale by suggestive dance and song, the moral suicide victims of undeveloped mentality, are for the most part free, unhampered agents.

The snugly virtuous, glorified by contrast with their straying brothers and sisters have no counter influence over the Mogs; their condemnation is inert and nondestructive. As for the dwellers on the fence of mediocrity, their lack of high ideals and indifference to evils that do not immediately and directly affect them, renders them a negative quantity. They toil not for progress, neither do they spin for posterity. A mental attitude of indifference to evil is evidence of cowardice and is nearly as bad in its effects as active support of wrong. Force, in expressed opinion and action, is needed to put the profiteer in food and heart stuff out of business.

Swat all the grafters. This applies to the fawning, petty harpies of nickels and dimes as well as the smug, sneering grabfiends of illegitimate millions. A meek uplifting of hands and a sail full of sighs are not much good when it comes to squelching a Mog house, or bucket-shop. A fighting parson can do much, but a squad of husky cops will make a thorough clean-up in half of one-tenth of the time. As a matter of fact, the Mogolia became so popular, its takings so covetable, that a jealous competitor played a treacherous but socially useful and assisting part in closing it up—but not within Julie's hours of initiation did the raid take place. No alien foot trespassed, no harsh voice now pronounced in vulgar phrase: "The house is pinched!" and thus broke the charm of the spell that held Julie in enjoyable interest.

After dinner was over Artie leaned back in his chair and glanced around with approving speculative consideration. Here and there he met the eyes of several anthropoides who were evidently more interested

in the girl who sat facing Artie than their own painted and somewhat world-frayed partners. As brutes on the scent of some dainty morsel, so did the blasé hounds of the sidewalk and lounge roués, figuratively speaking, lick their chops at the prospect of being invited to meet Artie's young friend. Adventurous, unsophisticated innocence, plus maidenly youth, was a passing race and worth while tidbit on the menu of the Mogolia's entertainment. Thus, for a brief while, can an ordinary, indiscriminating and not particularly fascinating girl occupy a place on the unstable throne of desirability. It is natural that a young girl should feel pleasure in the knowledge that she is attractive; but the pity of it all lays in the circumstance that she will not distinguish between clean smiles and soiling leers. Vanity is her blindfold, and flattery gives deafness to the inner warning of sense and conscience.

"I s'd worry," scoffs Miss Adventurous as she gaily steps aboard the jazz-wagon. "It's me f'r a good time, th' white lights an' high spots. I sh' shimmy!"

She does. And after a summer of dancing, the grasshopper of fabled renown came to a winter of discontent and real, honest-to-goodness shiveriness.

Artie was thorough in giving each one of his numerous acquaintances a leisurely survey; but he took good care that none of them could construe his casual gaze as a summons to come to his table. A man who has a prize kitten to sell usually seeks a purchaser who is not too parsimonious in the matter of paying a high price. To state Artie's condition of mind with cold-blooded exactitude, he was desirous of making a profitable return on the money he had already expended on Julie. A shocking and disgusting ambition; but, however we must deplore the circumstances weaving about Julie, we know that she had not sought love or even a glimmer of romance. Also in connection with that half-frightened, backward look Julie had cast over her shoulder, certain events unsuspected by the girl or Artie were pledged to fulfilment.

Julie had beckoned to promiscuous opportunity for having an unqualified good time and in consequence was far more com-

mitted to unpleasant results than she could have imagined. Indeed, the very ease with which she had accepted Artie Falwell as an escort was directly responsible for the possibilities of gain that were simmering in his mind. Getting Julie to the Mog had been a cinch. Ergo, getting rid of her would be another cinch, and, so did Artie gage his position; he would, by passing the girl along, unburden himself of all responsibility for her future career.

CHAPTER V.

ARTIE SPINS A LITTLE WEB.

"SHE feels good and pleased with herself now," Artie reflected with lewd acumen, "pats herself on the back she's got hold of an easy mark. I'll slide her off to old Sid, chicken à la stenog 'll tickle him to death."

Again did Artie's gaze shift about the café, but Sid was not to be seen. The only thing to do was to wait. There was no hurry; sooner or later, the obese old rake was sure to appear. Artie beckoned to Hamfist; but before the waiter reached his side, Julie made a whispered request that disturbed Artie's budding plans and caused a quick frown to draw his eyebrows together.

"You want to go home? Now?" he asked. "What's the great idea? We're only just beginning to get acquainted. Be a good sport. You ain't got nobody waiting for you. No ma to call you down. Besides, it's early. What's the use of being a piker? Ain't you havin' a good time? Let's take a whirl on the floor."

"I don't want to dance," said Julie. "I ought not to have come dressed like I am."

"Is that all that's bothering you?" Artie laughed. "Why, you look fine. Forget it."

"But it's not that. It's not my clothes. I could sit here all night. It's great, and I thing you're grand, but I *must* go now."

Julie's must was said falteringly and with downcast, apologetic eyes; but Artie realized she meant what she said. A look of sulky resentment came over his face.

"Nice thing," he grumbled, "messing up my evening."

The bald selfishness of this remark entirely escaped the girl. Favors should be met by corresponding favors. She had failed lamentably to live up to the laws of indiscriminate camaraderie. Something for nothing was not to be expected. Artie had paid for the taxi, the cocktails, the dinner; therefore, according to Moggish rules, it was up to her to be complaisant to some extent of her indebtedness.

Crudely, but none the less truly expressed, the majority of these hail-fellow-well-met experimental jaunts are on a sliding scale of barter and exchange. A man expends a varying sum of money for the fun, and the woman pays in making herself an agreeable companion. A good deal of this is undeliberated, and happens without any malice aforethought or ulterior motives, and although the girl cheapens herself, she often escapes any great harm by reason of the preponderance of decent men. But there are Arties who answer by the names of Tom, Dick or—Percy, and though they shed no blood, they are killers.

Artie Falwell's left hand dropped beneath the level of the table.

"Listen," he said, "I wanna tell you something. You've got me going. Whatever you say goes. You see it's this way—"

While he was telling his tale and lurefully swaying the girl's mind this way and that, Artie was holding her interest and playing for time. Only a few moments were needed for his hidden purpose, and during his spiel Artie's long, slim fingers reached for Julie's beaded hand-bag. Beneath the concealing table top the bag went on a short trip from the chair by her side to Artie's knees. There it stayed for a negligible number of seconds, and when Artie released his dupe's attention, there was a foundational support less in Julie's future. To-morrow could not be quite the same as to-day and yesterday.

"Now," he said, with grinning, expansive good fellowship, "I'm yours till you fire me. That's me all over. When you're ready we'll beat it. See you home, eh? We'll taxi it. I'll drop you at the corner of your street. I ain't no buttinsky. It's 'nough for me to have your company when you want me."

Truth to tell, consideration and such generous kindness were strange experiences to Julie, and she guilelessly and gratefully accepted Artie's avowals at their surface value.

Counterfeit bank-notes are more rare than human deceitfulness. "I am thy brother," asserts the tearful, crocodile trafficker in the needs of others, and forthwith soaks the self-helpless for as much as he can squeeze out of them.

CHAPTER VI.

LOSSES AND CROSSES.

THE article that is bought with money saved in self denial is the article that is valued for reasons apart from its monetary price. The care and trouble willingly expended upon an inanimate thing renders it a prized possession. The services freely given to any living creature fosters an affection that may or may not be mutual; but it certainly flows from the giver to the receiver.

While Julie had sat in the Mog café, the tail of a fox neckpiece had brushed against her shoulder as a woman passed, and the girl had called to mind a circumstance that had taken place two nights previous to this evening. As will presently be found, the thing she thought of was of comparative insignificance when considered isolated from its sequence of events; but she had, by a spontaneous service, unwittingly pledged herself to the instructive duties of affectionate responsibility. The touch of that fox scarf had occurred at a moment when her thoughts were not filled with any particular desire. She had eaten, drank, and was completely satisfied. Then came the impulse to go home.

In the midst of play a child drops its mud pie making and runs to its mother. In the middle of business a man picks up his telephone and rings up his wife. He probably talks of something that could easily have waited until he arrived home, but—well, neither the child or the man question their motives. Neither did Julie. All she knew was she wanted to get home. What she wanted to do when she got there was

fairly clear in her mind, but why she felt the urge to leave the Mog she could not, had she been able, have told.

According to arrangements, Artie stopped the taxi at the corner of the down-town street, and for a short while we leave him, silently chuckling and quite unaware that in his short acquaintanceship with Julie he has set in motion a ball of circumstances that are henceforward to control his movements to a defined yet future-veiled climax.

Along the street flitted the girl. Hurrying home! Such a home. A slab of old brickwork perforated with rectangular, glass-filled gaps it stood. The night shelter of the tired. The light from the street lamp directly facing the door illumined the foot-worn hollows in the stone stoop steps and the dingy "Rooms to Let" ticket leaning against the parlor window fastener.

Julie's rooming-house was no different in its atmosphere of shabby, dowdy respectability from its neighboring monuments to decayed gentility. Exterially it put up a fairly massive if not bold appearance. The hospitably broad front door was shabby and dull with smeary streaks. It was toemarked along the lower edge, and finger discolored wood showed around the night latch. The wide windows of the much advertised front parlor were draped with lax-hanging, dust-laden and light-obscuring lace curtains. The blank space between the twin windows seemed conclusive evidence that the room within was of noble breadth. Not so. Between the windows was a dividing lath and plaster wall, and—there were two front parlors. The brick work of the upper stories was red gray and stained with long streamer-like discolorations.

When it rained, the old house spilled the burden of its years of neglect in copious rivulets of tears from the rust-bored guttering. Still, there is good wine in old bottles, and viewed by one a stranger to the usual state of conditions as applied to fallen but venerable one-time habitations of the well-to-do, the house suggested an interior of old-fashioned but large, lofty rooms. At a guess one would have said it was a ten or, at the most, a twelve-room house. But not counting the basement—that semi-subter-

aneous domain inhabited by the lady who only seemed to emerge from her dungeon at rent-due hours—there were seventeen rooms! The four walls only enclosed space for nine rooms above the level of the sidewalk, yet there were seventeen. Beds in all of them. Ten of them double. Accommodation for twenty-seven human beings. The riddle is answered in one word: partitions. Thin, flimsy artifices supposed to give sound privacy to the unhappy renters of these cubicles erected in comfort-grudging observance of the bare requirements of Morpheus.

Where the daytime population is greater than the sleeping accommodation, those who stay in the hive are compelled to help the rentee landlady pay the house owner. Just now it is a bumper summer of harvest time for the property owner, and the pocket-pinching winter of the roomers' not unreasonable discontent.

Julie let herself in quietly, kept to the narrow strip of carpet in the hallway, and on nearing the top of the first flight of stairs, stepped over a board that she knew was loose and squeaky. This care and general noiselessness of movement was not caused by any refinement of thoughtfulness for the nerves of others, or by fear of being called to account for coming in late. So long as she punctually paid her room rent, did not leave the gas on, or use the hot-water faucet over often, the girl was free to come and go without let or hindrance at any hour she pleased. In that house of crowded roomers there was no one to praise or censure her; no one to bother about; no one to care for. It is the way of roomers, and the don't-make-a-noise custom is the peculiar difference of the lodging-house to the one-family homes.

Most old-timers in rooming ethics creep up and down stairs, pass, not walk, across the landings, cough discreetly and softly close doors. The ruling effect of environment is an active, though often unsuspected influence. The malignant germs of cancer live in some walls, wraiths of despondency prowl in some houses. In others live joy-inspiring spirits. Sensitive men and women have been driven to crazy deeds by the shut-in-ness of their one and only room.

Julie was only following the dictates of unconscious adopting of general practises. She was no more aware of the habit of silence that came over her once she was within the house, than she was sensitive to the stale, flat odors that ascended from the basement, or the whispering murmur and drone of voices throbbing monotonously behind closed doors or vibrating through the thin partitions. These things were so, and were part of her mostly unquestioning, uncurious existence.

Just as she was unmoral, so she was unaccustomed to acute sensitiveness to the push and pull of the inanimate. There are patterns on wall-papers that form leering, gibing faces at unhappiness. Chairs that cackling creak at discomfort of tired body and limbs. There are beds that seem to be hoodooed with taunting groans prohibitive of restful sleep to the nervous. Sundry places and plots of grass bear the discourteously terse notices: "Keep out and keep off." If rudeness in the printed word is allowable in these cases, the doors of some houses and many rooms should have nailed to them the same warnings.

Without stopping to light the gas, or close her door, Julie knelt by her bed and fumbled underneath it. She drew out a fair-sized cardboard hat-box, and before she lifted the lid she knew the thing she had vaguely feared had come to pass: some one, in all probability the landlady, had discovered her secret and she had come home too late. If she had not stayed at the office working overtime. If she had not gone to the Mog. If—

Julie dropped the lid of the box by her side and mechanically felt over the old rag she had carefully made a nest of. Her groping fingers touched no warm, stirring little body. Even the bottom of her soap-dish that she had that morning filled with milk, was gone.

"Kitty, kitty," she cried softly, and leaned her hot forehead against the bed.

In the next room a crabbed old woman heard the faint sounds of the girl's distress, and her bed creaked as she turned over resentfully. What, indeed, had she to do with the troubles of a flighty, stay-out-to-all-hours-of-the-night girl? The very idea!

To the man who has unfortunately lost the saving grace of sympathetic understanding that lingers on in the hearts of the great majority, to the woman whose mother-kindness has been shriveled by worldliness, a battered candy-stick, old doll may be a thing of distaste; a piece of junk to be kicked aside. To the child-owner of this disreputable effigy the case is different, and contempt or rough treatment of that doll is justly resented. That pet of sawdust and plaster has been partner of childish, but none the less real, joys and sorrows. It has been told secrets and never betrayed the trust bestowed upon it. It has been a faithful friend and playmate.

The true worth of all prized possessions lays not in their cash price of purchase or in their sale value. That scrap of lace, that old pipe! Prized not for what they are, but for what they represent. The one may be a token of a day of great happiness; the other is the never-failing old pal and companion of many hours of lonely thought. That old brooch set with seed pearls? It is of fine gold. It is out of date and cannot be worn in consistent fitness with present fashion. Yet it has a market value. It could be sold, and its quaint, old-fashioned shape could be rendered in the crucible to a little puddle of material for new fashioning. Some collector of the antique might buy it. Do we sell? Not if we can help it, and we remember that it belonged to mother's mother.

So the kitten that Julie mourned, although in itself but a scraggy representative of a species of selfish, comfort-cadging, long-tailed egoists, was regretted by her because—well, there were all kinds of good reasons. She had rescued it from the dangers of the street. She had bought milk for it. For that kitten she had made sacrifices. Small, but nevertheless genuine enough. And, though she had had cause for heartbreak by greater sorrow, she would sob alone.

Angels of goodness dwell in dark places as well as in paradise, but the confirmed rumor is shy on sympathy, or inert by long inurement in exile from family and friends.

The average rooming-house is a place for transient lodgers, for young beginners in

business life, and for the sad and forlorn workers who have by lack of endeavor or adverse combination of circumstance, missed their mark by insensible degrees and relegated themselves to the pitiful ranks of the has-beens. By some saving, merciful, yet fatal dullment of mind, these last somehow, and often, contrive to be content and obtain a low-level placid form of happiness. They live in and by retrospective memories. They ponder and reflect on the slowly unwinding pictures of old loves, old joys, and faded scenes from the days long gone. Their present is a dreamy form of hibernation. They seclude themselves from new impressions, new avenues of thought; and their future is misted by submission to the mistaken conviction that the call to be up and doing is no longer for them.

If you are seeking for a fallen and impoverished, long lost friend whom you know is still in this plane of existence, and whom you have a suspicion is hiding somewhere in the overcrowded residential sections of the city, go look for him in a rectangular box where there is a creaky bed, a cracked water pitcher, a crooked window-shade, and an aura of junkdom from things inanimate. You'll find him in the hall-room; the sometime morgue of dead hopes and faith of living victims.

Better to go down in victory than to expire slowly under the hope-disintegrating poison of self abandonment to the destructive action of reconciliation with defeat. By the magic of viewing the dear past with constructive vision, and throwing overboard the indulgence in small habits so greedily absorbent of dribblets of valuable but wasted energy, the hermit-like roomer will immediately discover that the stigma of has-been-ness was after all only a thought. The fact is, no one need be in that wretched condition of mind, unless they wilfully so desire. The memory of that beloved one; the dimmed flame of that ambition should be honored by effort and determination to find pleasure in—work.

The hall-room is the ante-chamber to imprisonment of the best in oneself or—freedom. Viewed as a means to an end of good achievement, it serves its intended purpose in the scheme of lodgment. It fits, accom-

modates a lean purse; but it should never become a habit to those who have the power to labor for better surroundings. The money saved by them who can afford better quarters, but who too long oppress themselves with the ambition smothering influence of the hall-room, lay themselves open to insidious drain on their health and a slow seeping away of their initiative and spiritual *elan*.

No matter how pretty the wall-paper may be, the hall-room is a place to get out of. It is a shelter, a refuge from storm, a convenient, by-the-way stopping place, but it should never be regarded as a permanent home.

After a while Julie's sobs dwindled to complete silence. The reaction from her evening's excitement, the slightly hysteric outburst caused by the loss of her pet, spent itself, and she felt in her hand-bag for her handkerchief. In doing so her fingers missed a tightly rolled treasure. Only that afternoon had she added a two-dollar bill, the reward of the week's overtime, to her store of money. Now—

Julie throat constricted, her lips went dry. Frantically she sought for the matches. When the gas flared, she stared into her bag. Her money had gone!

CHAPTER VII.

SOLD FOR A TWO-DOLLAR BILL.

JUST about the moment when Julie discovered her loss, Artie Falwell reentered the Mog café. Not by a margin reaching to the early hours of the morning was his night amusement finished. After he had sat down, and as a preliminary seasoning to further enjoyment, he took a small roll of bank-notes from his pocket. They had been earned by irksome routine; by honest, hard work. Artie never did any work of any kinship with honesty so—the inference is clear.

"Fourteen bucks," he muttered as he counted his "find" and thought: "Not so bad. Eleven or twelve I spent on her. That leaves me two to the good on the deal. Silly little boob! Maybe I'll loan her a dollar or two. I'll see what Sid has to say.

Hard luck he didn't have the chance t' give her the once over. He c'd have seen at a glance she ain't no second-handed goods. Guess he'll turn up before twelve and I'll fix a date for t'-morrow night. I'll bet a dollar that blue-eyed fluff 'll be ready t' lick my shoes by time evening comes."

Callous, unsavory; but why mislead by tricking up the sordid in fancy costume? The minds of Arties are not given to anything but fermentation of malignant, death-on-decency desires. Where there was reason for Julie's submission to the pull of risqué adventure; there were no mitigating circumstances about Artie Falwell. He knew what he was doing. There is hope for the rascal who can grin occasionally with good humor. Artie never smiled unless the pose of being an amiable fellow was likely to help along some ulterior motive. He had no sense of humor and was nothing but a self-made sophist.

Sophistication, which is only a convenient term for world sharpness concerning the ever changing, ever ebbing and flowing mode in manners, fashions, and general pseudo smartness in one's taste in slang, shoes, and morals, is a comparative quality. A laundry maid can, in her degree of social status, be as sophisticated as a shekel-gowned bud of high society. The main difference between the two girls being that the bud has a greater measure of self-protectiveness. Familiar with shows: doggy, horsey, operatic, and gastronomic, the latter can capably hold her own in finesse of *savoir faire* and *affairs intrigant*. Her education, domestic or foreign, her masters of arts and crafts, her mistresses in less flamboyant accomplishments, her dressmakers, her friends and her servants, all conspire to teach her as little as possible unallied to the cultivation of a super-palozied and precocious ego. Her soul is regarded as a spiritual appendix, a nebulous germ to be extinguished by neglect and smothered by glorification of the physical belle-form.

To a subdivided hairline, this expensively cultivated bud knows the borderland twixt safe and *risqué* flirtation. She may have a merry bunch of chubby cupids painted on the ceiling of her boudoir; but

the poor little starveling that waits upon her when her fancy veers toward the choice of a suitable mate, has his quiver full of leaden-tipped darts. He draws his bow at bank-rolls, armorial bearings, and such like trifles that have no standing in the court of love. When our bud is marriage bent, cupid is really very much *de trop*. She has no need of him, for before she makes her debut she has gone through her finishing course and is not shyly peeping for romance. She knows whom to know and whom to snub. She dresses well, eats according to her *embonpoint*, flirts with discreet intelligence and never makes a *faux pas*; and no creature comforts being denied, she never, never had any adventure.

Other girls, less financially comforted, are perhaps more charming in manner, certainly more natural, and decidedly more inclined to step out. The girl who has to face the world on her own merits, who has not been coddled into the belief that she is a creature with privileges above her sisters, has a chance to develop and discover the deeper truths that come with decency, kindness and love. It is not the baby cradled in the pearl encrusted crib and dandled on the knee of a paid foster mother who has the opportunity to achieve greatness in manhood or womanhood. The pioneers in arts, letters, business, politics, and discoveries of benefits to the human race, seldom came from the palaces and mansions of the panderers to society's whirlingig. Master Heirtomillion and Miss Goldenbud have no incentive to find themselves in work. With few exceptions they grow flaccid with fatty degeneracy of the cranial nerves, and play cup and ball with life. It is in the homes where dollars are earned and hard won, that we may look for the eminent men and women of to-morrow. Inherited wealth with all its attendant, effort-stifling luxuries is a premium on laziness, not to mention vicious selfishness.

Julie Somers was reaching out, trying to break trail for herself; but because she lacked a true sense of values, she was going in the wrong direction. She had been born to disadvantages. Her experience had been unselfintentionally, wrongly classified in her

compendium of knowledge of good and evil.

Basic, elemental endowments aside, a new-born child is a white page. Some are of good quality, others of poorer stuff; but they are all as clear and ready for impressions as an unexposed photographic negative. After our baby's first glint of perceptivity, which is in all probability a response to the warmth of its mother's breast, come two tiny trickling streams of good and bad impressions. The streams swell to rivers and rivers to torrents. Some of these are beneficial, swift flowing, but clear and pure. Others, quite as rapid and fluid flowing, are muddled and defiled. Circumstance dictates which stream shall more greatly flow through the child's mind.

Flippant Miss Blonde had sown her tiny seed. Cunning Artie tended its growth for what he believed were designs entirely within his own control. He was maliciously meddling, and there is no more abysmally self-deluded fool than the one who underestimates or thinks to dodge the rebound of evil intentions and deeds.

The written laws, bound in calf-skin, are fixed and complex. The unwritten law is fluid and simple. Persistent sowing of good seed in good fields means a good harvest. Scatter rotten seed and reap disaster. In the ultimate a good cause always results in a good effect. To the casual eye, one dollar looks as good as another, and one plus one make two. They do, according to the adding-machine; but the power value of a paper dollar is not confined to exchange for silver, nickel, bronze, and goods. It has a potential influence upon its possessor which is unalienably attached to the good or bad effort expended in attaining it. Thus: one honestly earned dollar plus one dishonestly obtained dollar do not, whatever the machine may record, make two dollars of equal, potential value. So far—is enough.

Aside from other money in his possession, Artie had twelve dollars in his hip-pocket and one two-dollar bill he had, in a whim of forethoughtful, impish malice, put for safe-keeping in his vest pocket. Fourteen dollars that he had stolen from Julie's bag. Representative to him for so much extra for drinks, cigarettes or petty graft.

Fourteen bucks! Good, Federal notes; yet one two-dollar bill was the symbol of his death warrant.

When Sid, hoggishly pompous, fatly patronizing lowered his flabby bulk onto the chair kept engaged for him by Artie, he listened to a merry-tale. Hellion sparks of interest flickered in Sid's cold, crook-knowing, small eyes; but he said little.

"It's a cinch, a walk over," concluded Artie after he had dilated on Julie's physical charms. "She's a simp through and through. No folks. I ain't got no use for her, but—"

For a long moment Sid's fishy, implacable eyes considered the younger black-guard's face.

"All right," he grunted at last. "Maybe I'll happen along to-morrow. You know what to do. What? Your bit. That'll be all right. You know me!"

After paying for a drink, Sid, the unnameable in further fitting title, waddled over to a table surrounded by the pink of underworld professionals.

Artie was left alone, but not for long. A woman took the chair vacated by Sid. Artie gazed at her wonderingly.

"Wanna drink, Leila?" he asked.

"Not with you, you—no, I don't mean anything. Take no notice of me for a while. I'm all upset. *C'est plus forte que moi*. I want to talk to you. I'll buy."

Artie nodded. He was not at all particular who paid for his drinks or where the money came from. The woman's agitation and suppressed excitement didn't bother him one whit; but the phrase she had used roused his instinct of suspicion.

"What was that you said? Why can't you talk plain lingo? Not that foreign stuff. You ain't French anyhow, and what's good enough for me's good enough for you. Give it in English."

"I only said: it is stronger than I, that's all."

"What? The booze?"

Unutterable disgust flamed in Leila's lowered eyes, but she kept a tight leash on her tongue.

"No," she said, "I was thinking about that girl. I have been here all evening. Where is she?"

"Know her?" asked Artie with sudden, sharp interest.

Leila shook her head.

"I never saw her before."

"Then what the—what's it got to do with you where she is?"

"Only that I felt sorry for her."

"You did!"

Artie showed his white teeth in a sneering, meaning grin.

A tinge of red deepened the tone of the woman's rouged cheeks. Her fingers, laced in her lap, clenched.

"You were talking to Sid just now," she went on in a level monotone.

"Sure. Priv'te business. Any more questions?"

"Are you going to see that girl again? Bring her to this place?"

"Why?"

"Because she doesn't belong here. She's different to—to the rest of us."

"You bet she is," Artie laughed with coarse, comprehensive significance.

Leila sighed heavily. She was accustomed, tamed in a sense, to the expectation of crude rottenness of manner and speech in Mog mankind. And still she persisted in endeavoring to carry out the purpose that had brought her to Artie's table. She was fumbling in the slime for a grain of gold. She tried a new tack.

"Would you bring a sister of yours here?" she asked.

"Ain't got one," retorted Artie, delighted to be literal.

"You had one woman in your life that you respected," said Leila with intense feeling.

"Wrong again. They all look alike to me s'far as the respect fake goes. I'm wise."

"But—your mother?"

Artie lifted his glass. The watching woman saw that his hand wavered ever so little. His face seemed paler. Had she touched the right chord? Had she found that grain of hidden gold? Would she be able to go home that night with the comforting knowledge that in all her years of submission to the precarious life of a chattel, she had been able to help toward the fulfilment of one good deed. Could the girl

be saved from the slaughter? For half a decade she had shrugged her shoulders at circumstances. Her whole personality had hardened, toughened with long repression to the Leila that had been ten years ago. To-night she had found that the other Leila was not dead, she had been buried alive. Now she stirred again in the self-debased Leila of the Mog café. Why this sudden disinterment? This exhumation of but a faintly breathing identity? Just because the sight of Julie had reversed the binocular view of memory.

Up until the moment when the girl had passed her table, earlier in the evening, Leila had kept her mind clamped to the present. She had cultivated callousness. When, on rare occasions, she had fearfully viewed the happy, past days of girlhood, she had reduced the images and forced the scenes to misted distances. Julie in her youth, her stamp, her hall-mark of maiden purity, had caught Leila off her guard. The worm-built coral of protectiveness to remorse and regret had disintegrated. She stood amid the ruins of the painted, smiling woman, and saw in Julie herself again. Clean, foolish, trusting and venturesome. Does one hesitate to snatch a child from the fire? The answer is: Leila sat at Artie's table.

Leila was right, Artie had quailed. There was in him a tiny oasis where the all-enduring love of a true mother had found sanctuary. Unknown to him it had remained, cramped, buried in the riff-raff and garbage of fungoid growths of vileness. While he raised his glass he saw his mother's face, he heard her voice. Through the lurid, miasmatic vapors of his aura, through the tainted Mog, her sweetness came to him and—

In years, the total of which is really of significance only in the fullness of them, Artie was young; but he had nurtured an old, old beast; a thing of turgid octopian stealth and strength. It had been nourished on the healthy vitals of his character. The suckers of selfishness had drained him of charity, the tentacles of dishonor had bound his will. The thing had spawned the Artie who now cursed and ground the assassin heel of obliteration on the revealed

sanctuary. In suppliant appeal for mercy to another, Leila had probed with a white wand. Response to its touch could have turned Artie face about to redemption. He had the choice; but he preferred to crush, to destroy, and with no penalty of man-made punishment before him, he became a matricide. He had betrayed a more precious thing than life. He had severed the vital son-to-mother artery. He had murdered love. He expressed his views:

"Nix on the sob stuff, Leila. Mush don't go with this dicky bird. Me for the dough and the good time. What's eating you anyway? You've got the willies, that's what. Too much tea, eh? We're both in the same little old boat. Eh?"

"We're not. I sell myself. You sold out long ago. Now you're selling others."

"I should worry. If you ain't satisfied, it's your funeral, it ain't none of my doing that a lotter boobs get stung. Anyway, I don't see what you're up in the air about. Think I'm going to pass up a chance to make my bit?"

Leila made no reply. She held out her hand, tightly closed. It was a small hand, and the edge of a piece of paper protruded between the joints of her little finger.

"You're talking," said Artie, quick to see the thing that spoke loudest to him. "What's the great idea? A transfer? I see, you want to get in on the deal. Open up. I ain't taking no sealed bids. Not from you anyway."

"There's forty dollars here," murmured the woman. "Will you take it and—"

"Sure I will."

"And leave that girl alone?"

"For that? You're crazy. An' you think I am. I ain't saying from who; but you know as well as I do that I'll get five, ten times as much as that. You're on the make all righty, but you ain't got enough cash."

"I'll take my oath I'm on the level with you," breathed Leila. "Give me time, and I'll see what I can do. Take this, now, won't you?"

Artie turned sidewise, crossed his legs and brushed a fleck of ash from his knee.

"Money, cash money, and plenty of it is the only thing that talks to me," he said, and added with casual finality. "You ain't got enough of it."

"Turn round and face me."

As he stared the impudent indifference faded from Artie's face. Leila's words had not been uttered above the volume of a whisper, but the force of an order was in them. The threat of a maddened creature was in her dark, intense eyes.

"You asked me just now," began the woman, "why I wanted you to let that girl alone. Well, I'll tell you. No, you don't have to get nervous and look around for help, and nobody but you is going to hear me. Most of 'em would grin and side with you anyway. This is just between you and me. If you move before I've finished I'll smash this glass in your face."

This was language that Artie could understand. He sat quite still. Vicious, oh, yes; but he did not move. He heard some more, and listening—planned.

"It was," went on Leila with no raising of her menacing, low voice, "a creature like you; a lying, lowdown rat, who shoved me over the edge of decency to hell. Your rat mind could not understand if I told you the agony it means to a decent girl to be made a doormat of by things as foul and rotten as you are. You are so morally putrid that all you care for is to stick cigarettes in your ugly face, gargle booze, and eat. We women pay. To save our faces we pretend we like the life we lead. You— you scum, you grin and *do* like it. A woman is never shameless. At heart she— Bah! I'm a fool to talk to a thing lower than a gob of mud. I tried to plead with you; I tried to buy you. Now I warn you. *Leave that girl alone!*"

Two minutes later Leila was at another table, back again to the guise of a Mog woman—smiling—but differently.

The only way to effectually and quickly render harmless a copperhead is not to give it warning that it is going to be exterminated or thwarted in its serpent ways.

For upwards of an hour Artie sat—planning.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

Raw Material

by

Herman Howard Matteson



MRS. BARTO HENDRICKS, whom Tumtum Teller, strictly to himself, however, had nicknamed "The Walrus," on account of a habit she had of rising up beside him at the most unexpected times, and giving him a tusky and menacing snarl, whereof two unusually prominent eye-teeth furnished the illusion, stood at the rail of the Alaskan liner looking down upon the wharf of the Hendricks Salmon Cannery at Kuskokwim. Mrs. Hendricks turned, and with a movement like that of running a crooked forearm through the handle of a basket, beckoned her niece, Lillian, to her side.

Mrs. Hendricks bobbed her head truculently. "Just take a good look at him now, Lillian."

Lillian leaned against the rail and looked. A big, florid-faced, young man, wearing a stag flannel shirt of once brilliant hue, and a pair of tarpaulin trousers so varnished and stiffened with the gore and scales of slain salmon that they looked not like trousers at all, but rather like the nether part of some sort of mediaeval armor, was bidding good-by to the cannery hands who had worked under his foremanship during the summer.

Thrusting his great, freckled paw this way and that among the press of grinning, dirty men about him, Aleut Indians, Japanese, Chinese, half-breeds, whites, many of whom in line of duty he had been compelled to man-handle, Tumtum bade them all fare-

well. In answer to a score of questions, Tumtum assured the men that the cannery would run next year, with ten lines of machinery, put up a hundred thousand talls and flats of springs and silvers if the run didn't fail, plenty of work for everybody, good wages, and *hiyu* chuck to eat in the chuck-house.

But they would have a new foreman. He wasn't coming back.

"You come back purty dam' sure, Tumtum," expostulated a squat, powerful Aleut. "You sure come, Tumtum. You no come, I don't come neither; I go work by Alaska packers."

Tumtum shook his head. No, he wasn't coming back.

"Oh, hell, yes, sure," urged a Japanese lacquerer, "you come or bust, Tumtum."

No, Tumtum wasn't coming back. A second time he shook the waving forest of hands yellow, red, and brown.

Disapprovingly the Walrus was eying the scene. "Look how friendly he is, and thick with those dirty fish men. Ain't that course? Can you think of him ever doing anything polite, or noble? Fish man."

A suspicion of a tear showed in the girl's brown eyes. Within the hour, to Tumtum's stammering almost humorous proposal of marriage, she had said "no." Just the same, Tumtum was her old playmate.

Besides, her father, Heavo Hendricks, had been a fish man. Heavo Hendricks had started with a battered dory, and a

patch of drift net, had gone on, doggedly, sometimes brutally on until he had built a cannery, a second, a third. They were here now, the three canneries, Lillian Hendricks was the millionaire heiress of a fish man, Heavo Hendricks.

A vague regret swept over the girl. She sort of wished that she had remained at home, on Cypress Island of Puget Sound, that she hadn't traveled, accumulated sophistication, seeking novelty, loosing content. Most of all she wished that her aunt had remained in the East, hadn't come on to find and point out the glaring, unanswerable crudities in Tumtum Teller.

Her aunt was right. Tumtum was kind, fair to everybody, was a perfect steam engine for work, but, oh, so unpolished and untamed. Yes, her aunt was right. Lillian couldn't, just couldn't, think of Tumtum ever doing anything noble, or imposing.

A flush of shame swept over her. Tumtum Teller was exactly what her own father, Heavo Hendricks had made him. And, like her father, Heavo Hendricks, Tumtum was beloved, but never would be esteemed.

Like her father was Tumtum Teller. And why not? Since the day that Tumtum had been large enough to pull a dory, he had worked with and for Heavo Hendricks.

As Hendricks accumulated fish-trap locations, built canneries, and tugs, and scows, he loaded Tumtum with new responsibilities. Heavo Hendricks swore by Tumtum Teller.

"He's righter than a new rope, Tumtum is," had been the old fish man's favorite metaphor. "Righter than a new rope, sixteen threads to the strand, weighs according to his length, no short ends tucked in under that will fetch away first time you bend him to a load.

"Yeah. And Tumtum is made fast to this shebang with a double, tar splice. Tumtum was here when the Hendricks company slined its first salmon; I have my say, he'll be here when the engineer turns steam for the last quittin'."

But, really—there her aunt had touched her shrewdly—Lillian couldn't think of Tumtum doing anything more elevated than outswear a tug-boat skipper, or mail recalcitrant cannery hands into subjection.

She couldn't think of Tumtum cast in a rôle noble or dignified. Not since she had traveled, and under the tutelage of her aunt she had observed the ways of gentlemen she couldn't.

Lillian had spent six months in Japan, had accumulated a smattering of the language. She had been three months at Papette, three months at Honolulu, she had spent a winter at Palm Beach, another at Coronado, everywhere meeting men who seemed to move like parts of a well-oiled machine.

These men of the world had polish, gentility, a tutored suavity. They were the finished product. That was it, the finished product. Tumtum Teller had worth of a rugged sort, but he was the raw material.

Tumtum Teller, hurt, humiliated, surveying the squat buildings of the Hendricks Salmon Cannery, Kuskokwim, Alaska, decided that his sobriquet, "Tumtum," must have been conferred by old Heavo while in a facetious mood. "Tumtum" is a word of the Chinook Indian tongue, a trade language understood and spoken from the California line to Point Barrow. The word means "courage," "honesty," "a clean, stanch heart."

His name was a joke. He was a joke.

Aleut cannery hands, embarking in their kisks and umiaks, were calling back profane farewells to Japs, Chinese, white men as they puddled along the sloppy dock, mounted the gangplank of the liner, their duffle bags upon their backs. Shortly the liner would weigh, for Seattle, the last boat out.

Tumtum glanced up at the ship's high side. The Walrus and Lillian were standing at the rail, looking down at him. The Walrus was talking about him.

He knew it. In her speech, he knew there would be no breath of compliment. Tumtum's face flushed. Under his breath he muttered an impolite word.

Very well. This would end his labors with the Hendricks Cannery Company. He had sixteen hundred dollars coming, his wages for the season's work. A thousand dollars he must pay on the Puget Sound trap location that he had bought on contract. Must pay the thousand or loose all

that he had paid thus far, four thousand dollars.

He would pay the thousand. He would seek work elsewhere, save up another thousand. Then he would own a good location of his own. Forever then would he be free and independent of the Hendricks Cannery Company.

But the thought brought him no comfort.

Entering a door at the end of the cannery building, an apartment that had been both office and sleeping-room, Tumtum snatched down his good suit from a nail, thrust it with a miscellany of socks, shirts, collars, into a canvas ditty-bag.

He wouldn't change his clothes. What was the use? He was a fisherman. Why masquerade in gentleman's garb when he wasn't a gentleman? No, he'd wear the stag flannel shirt, and the scale-plated tarpaulin pants.

As Tumtum emerged from the door, Willie Katimura, a smart, Americanized Jap, who had been boss of the sliming crew, which means the hands who hack off the tails and fin ends from fish missed by the Iron Chink, the half-human machine that cleans the fish, was coming down the dock, a vision of sartorial splendor in yellow, buttoned shoes, tight trousers, and a pinch-back coat.

Behind Willie teetered a Japanese girl dressed in a gayly flowered obi. She looked as if she might just have stepped from a Japanese screen from among storks, lily-pads, sprays of cherry-blossoms that seem always to grow and thrive at the base of the mountain of Fujiyama.

This was Sei Densu, picture bride. Willie Katimura had paid seven hundred and fifty dollars cash money for her. She had landed at Kachikan from Japan a few days before, had arrived that morning at Kuskokwim on the liner that now was to take them all to Seattle.

Sei, a gold bodkin thrust through her enamel, black hair, lips scarlet as fresh blood, shuffled by Tumtum, her eyes staring straight ahead of her. In one tiny hand she clasped a small, lacquered box, the only treasured keepsake that she had brought from Nippon. On the cover of the box was

printed in Japanese characters, one of the cold, comfortless verses so favored among the stoic believers in Buddha:

*Momiji-ha wo kaze ni makasete,
Miru yori mo,
Hakanaki mono wa Inochi nari keri.*

"More fleeting than the glint of withered leaf wind blown, the thing called life."

Sei plodded on, in one hand the lacquered box, in the other her precious "*chock-chee*." Her *chock-chee* was her passport to America. Literally it was her bill of sale, for seven hundred and fifty dollars.

Tumtum felt sorry, mighty sorry for Sei Densu. He just couldn't help putting Lillian Hendricks in Sei's place, imagining Lillian sold to somebody, anybody in Japan for seven hundred and fifty dollars.

Clasping the *chock-chee*, that was legal tender for seven hundred and fifty dollars anywhere on the coast where there were Chinese and Japs, and the little, lacquered box, Sei climbed the gangplank after Willie Katimura.

Chu Fan, boss of the Chinese contingent, was chattering away volubly as he herded the coolies to the foredeck, thence to the fo'c's'l', telling them off in tens as he slid the colored beads upon the wires of a counting-rack.

Then Chu Fan labored up the plank. Last to leave the dock was Tumtum Teller.

At the shrill pipe of the bosun's whistle, the deckers cast off the head-line, stern-line, spring-line. Black smoke began to roll from the liner's funnels. The craft's asthmatic wheeze became a throbbing roar. The ship was off for Seattle.

Tumtum Teller turned for a last look at the cannery he expected never to see again. This cannery, with its long lines of machinery, its shrilling polyglot of help, he had coaxed, teased, threatened and man-handled until it had turned out its ultimate capacity of cases of talls and flats of spring and silver salmon. Lillian Hendricks, owner, had had no word of praise for his faithfulness, but only scorn for his rude ways and uncouth presence.

Tumtum smiled wanly at the thought that came to him. If, by any chance, the ghost of old Heavo Hendricks were hover-

ing near, old Heavo would be saying: "Good, Tumtum! You've run her to a frog's feather, this cannery. Yeah!"

Then Tumtum Teller sighed. The liner was nosing its way into the spume of gray sea and somber sky that lay ahead off the turbulent Pass of Unimak. This voyage that he had looked forward to as triumphal, as a very epithalamium to his marriage to Lillian was turning out to be a funeral cortège of all his hopes. Ten tedious, dragging days lay ahead.

Tumtum leaned his ditty-bag against the rail. Presently he would hunt up his quarters and stow his stuff. He wondered where he would be lodged. The ship was loaded to full capacity.

In the forecastle would be lodged the Chinese. Aft, in a little cubby of a room slatted off like a cell, all by herself they would quarter Sei Densu, the picture bride.

Aloft, on the hurricane deck, best state-rooms on the ship, Lillian and her aunt would lodge.

On the promenade deck would be the rooms of himself, and of the other white workers.

Tumtum called to a cabin-boy, learned the number of his room, hunted it up, flung his ditty-bag into a corner, seated himself upon the edge of the bunk.

Tumtum began to think about the two thousand dollars that he owed still upon the Sound fish-trap location. He had sixteen hundred. He would require six hundred of the amount to live on until the next season opened. A thousand dollars—he owed two thousand on the trap.

Already, below decks, in the stodgy salon, the poker game would be going, and still would go until the liner berthed at Seattle. And it would be a poker game, no piker stuff, a game in which a Coolie Chinese slimer or rimmer would wager his year's pay, next year's, and the wages of the year after that, giving as earnest of his intent to pay a "plaplod," a bit of yellow paper with some hen-track writing on it that was as good as the wheat for the amount stated in any Chinese company store in Seattle, Portland, San Francisco.

Oh, yes, a regular game. A Chinese, a Jap, a Filipino will bet his money, shirt,

his wives, and his children, and, if he loses, pay.

Tumtum was thinking. Tumtum was not what one, with propriety, could call a gambler. Perhaps once in a year, or two years, circumstances would intrigue him to sit in. But he was no gambler.

Still he sat thinking of the two thousand he owed, of the one thousand only that he had to pay, and he sat thinking also of Lillian Hendricks. With Lillian's "no," had tumbled his house of cards. But had it?

No less an authority than Heavo Hendricks himself had held to the belief that when a man had been unlucky in love was the time when he was sure to be lucky at cards. Then, too, there was an Indian saying in which Tumtum believed profoundly, that seemed to bolster up the situation: "The wind that blows shut the north door, blows open the south."

Unlucky in love, lucky at cards.

Surely then this would be his day of days with the fateful pasteboards.

Tumtum arose from the edge of the bunk, fumbled his sixteen-hundred-dollar pay-check from his pocket, stood staring at it while he repeated the spell words; "Unlucky in love, lucky at cards."

Entering the purser's office, Tumtum threw down the pay-check, asked for the cash.

"You going to horn in, Tumtum?"

"Yeah," replied Tumtum. "I'm going to bend some of them Chinks and Mickadoos till they start a seam. Give me all cash."

At the door of the purser's office, his great hand clasped about a wad of fifties, hundreds, twenties, Tumtum came to a stop and looked back over his shoulder.

"What you figure the steamship company would ask for this boat, Charlie?"

"Oh, about seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. You hain't thinking of buying, are you, Tumtum?"

"Yeah. I'll give you the money when we get to Seattle—if they's anything in signs."

Willie Katimura, the smart Jap sitting in the game, a sizable cylinder of gold, twenty-dollar pieces before him on the

table. Chu Fan, the Chinese boss was in. Harve Moss, foreman of the cannery company's pile-driver crew was in. Dominigo, a Filipino was in.

Besides these, there was a Chinese slimer, and a Japanese lacquerer. The players scraped their chairs a bit more closely together, and Tumtum Teller was in.

There were no poker-checks in use. They were playing with real money. Now and then a player would shove a "plaplod" to the center of the table, take out the change in money. Plaplods were as good as the gold.

All day the game continued, fortune now swinging to Katimura, now to Moss, then to Chu Fan. Once or twice the jade appeared to be edging toward Tumtum. But she was merely coquetting, never serious.

When the flunky thrust his head in at the salon door to bawl: "Last call to come and get it," Tumtum was eight hundred dollars to the bad.

After supper the game was resumed. Tumtum won back a hundred. At midnight, when by agreement they concluded the session with a round of Jack-pots. Chu Fan checked out with a killing. Tumtum had lost twelve hundred dollars. Harve Moss had lost two hundred. Katimura, the smart Jap, had lost six hundred.

Chu Fan's countenance, when he counted up his winnings, was as unmoved as the graven image of his votive joss. The face of Tumtum Teller, a bit more animated, was as serene as that of the Celestial.

Harve Moss drew Tumtum to one side as they were walking down the deck toward Teller's stateroom.

"Look, Tumtum," said Moss, "you hain't no more poker-player than a jack-rabbit. I don't want to see no Chinks and Japs unbelt a white man. You hain't a poker-player. You better sheer off.

"Why, Tumtum, when you do get a hand, your eyes bung, your neck gets red, and everybody drops out. I done it myself. You'd better sheer off."

Tumtum Teller merely grinned.

"Don't you go chafing your hawser, Harve," assured Tumtum. "Obliged for the hint, though, my neck getting red and so forth. But don't you worry about me

losing out in that game this stage of the moon. If you knew what I know—

"Why, Harve, all that loose poker money is mine just like I had it in the bank. You watch to-morrow. Them slant eyes will think they's a shark got into their spiller of fish.

"You the one better keep out, Harve. I'd rather you kept on working for the Hendricks Company a year or so instead of for me. You better keep out."

Mr. Moss shook his head resignedly, retired to his stateroom. No use arguing with a bull-head like Tumtum Teller.

Immediately after breakfast the game went on.

Tumtum, heeding the hint passed by Mr. Moss, had dug into his ditty-bag, got out a flannel shirt with a high collar. As visible sign, however, that he had no interest in any of the soft amenities of personal appearance, he still wore the atrocious, fish-scale armored, tarpaulin trousers.

As Tumtum took his seat, he turned up the collar of his shirt high about his ears. Then, when he palmed his five cards in the hollow of his right hand, cautiously skinned down the corners, he closed one eye entirely, squinted the other to the merest slit lest their starting betray the worth and quality of his draw.

Back and forth the luck seesawed. Tumtum won back the greater part of his losses, lost them again with a hundred dollars added.

Now and then, when the game began to drag, by common consent the players would take an hour off, walk the decks for a sniff of fresh air. Then at it again.

Tumtum, because luck had held him so long at teasing arm's-length began to doubt. Twice when he had returned to the game he had walked completely around his chair before seating himself. In the privacy of his stateroom, surreptitiously he had put his right shoe upon the left foot, the left upon the right.

And still he lost. Rather, he didn't win. There was something decidedly wrong with the signs.

Could it be that Lillian, after the reputed perverse manner of women, hadn't meant what she had said, that he did have a

chance in her affections and regard after all?

His heart gave a joyful leap. Tumtum emerged upon the promenade deck, walked forward.

Lillian, privileged always, was standing on the bridge. Tumtum scraped his heavy shoes noisily along the deck. Lillian turned and looked down at him.

Tumtum smiled, Lillian turned her head, went on talking with the officer on duty in a casual, unconcerned manner.

Tumtum turned, retraced his step to the door of the companionway. "There hain't a doubt," said he to himself as he went down the stair, "they hain't a doubt but what I'm due to win. Unlucky at love, lucky at cards. I'm just about due."

Day after day the game went on. Some evenings Katimura had the bank, one evening only it had belonged to Tumtum. The most consistent winner was Chu Fan, the China boss.

The Walrus, seasick to a degree that would have a little dissipated gloom in the breast of Tumtum Teller, had he known, kept strictly to her stateroom on the hurricane deck. As for Lillian, she ranged the ship, visited with the engineers on watch, which is against the rules, prowled about the forecabin, also against the rules, watched a Korean boy doing fancy work, became interested in a Jap can-lacquarer who was painting an exquisite little study of the omnipresent Fujiyama, with a cherry-tree in the foreground, a flight of storks, and a dainty Geisha girl wearing a flowered obi.

On one day approaching the end of the voyage, Lillian was gone an unconscionable time. Her aunt, the wretched *mal de mer* still upon her, demanded peevishly to know where the girl had been so long.

Lillian, staring abstractedly through the port light, replied that she had just been walking around.

Presently, Mrs. Barto Hendricks was able to leave the stateroom. Then she, too, began to prow about a bit. Mrs. Hendricks extended her walks to the promenade deck, began going below for her meals.

"Lillian," said her aunt severely upon an occasion when Mrs. Hendricks had just

come from below, "Lillian, poker gambling is the lowest thing."

Lillian nodded her head absently, agreed that poker gambling was low indeed.

"Well," said Mrs. Hendricks trenchantly, "that hired man of yours, Teller, is playing poker gambling this very minute in the salon with a lot of dirty Japs and Chinamen. He's been playing every minute since we left. The cabin-boy told me so. Poker gambling with Chinamen—what could be lower!"

Lillian flushed. Resentment, a flash of loyalty showed in her brown eyes.

"Dad used to play poker," she answered quietly. "That is, once in a while he did."

The Walrus champed her tusks, snorted, retired to her stateroom. She had always heard that the West was wild and tough. Now she knew that the half had never been told.

The liner had made through Unimak Pass, was heading the seas off Queen Charlotte. Still the game went on. Off Thompson Point, into the Straits of Fuca, up the Sound toward Seattle, and still the shift-eyed Katimura, the serene, impassive Chu Fan, the alternately sweating and collected Tumtum Teller shuffled, dealt, drew and dealt again.

Tumtum glanced through a port light. "Point No Point," he said, stabbing his thumb toward a visible jut of land. "We hain't got but about half an hour to play. Let's h'ist her. Just Jack-pots, five-dollar ante, and five-dollar sweetener."

In three swift hands, Chu Fan had reduced Tumtum's pile to three hundred dollars, had cleaned the smart Jap, Katimura, of every bill and gold piece that lay before him.

Tumtum dealt. Chu Fan opened. Katimura nodded his head to indicate that he was in, though he had not antied. Katimura's word was good in a poker game even if not especially good anywhere else.

Chu Fan raised. Tumtum raised him back. Tumtum shoved to the center of the table every circulating dollar that he possessed on earth.

Katimura's ratlike eyes made a swift appraisal of the amount of money on the table. He drew the money toward him,

laid down a bit of paper that was good for seven hundred and fifty dollars, the *chock chee* bill of sale of Sei Densu, the picture bride.

Then Katimura called.

Chu Fan, smiling benignantly, laid down his hand.

Tumtum began working loose the two-tight collar of his gray flannel shirt. He swallowed hard a time or two, lifted his feet that seemed like hunks of wood, one after the other, put them back upon the floor.

"Well," said Tumtum huskily, "I'm called, eh? Well, I got a procession, led by little lady in red."

Katimura's body jolted forward, and his jaw jarred loose. Hanging over the table, the Jap compared his hand with that of Tumtum. Tumtum had him beaten. Tumtum had won the *chock chee* bill of sale of little Sei Densu, and Katimura had not the wherewithal to redeem it.

"Little lady in red," repeated Tumtum, pointing to his hand. Katimura had a full house; Tumtum Teller had almost next door to a royal flush, the queen, Jack, ten, nine, and eight of hearts.

Tumtum stood to his feet, stretched his arms, picked up the *chock chee* bill of sale of little Sei Densu, the picture bride.

The liner's whistle bellowed forth hoarsely. The bell for half-speed jangled in the engine-room. Tumtum stepped to the promenade deck.

Forward, ready to land the moment that the gangplank was run out, Tumtum saw the long, fur-trimmed coat of Lillian Hendricks, and the pudgy, dolman enveloped form of the Walrus.

The ship was nosing in cautiously to the Seattle wharf. Tumtum turned, went below, followed by Chu Fan and Willie Katimura, both of whom had been watching him narrowly.

Before the wooden lattice work that separated the little, cubby room allotted to Sei Densu, Tumtum came to a pause. Dimly within the cubby, Tumtum could see the form of the girl huddled down in a corner. Her head was bent forward upon her bosom, her hands were folded resignedly in her lap.

Chu Fan, smiling unguently, touched Tumtum upon the arm.

"Fifteen hundred dolla," said Chu Fan, nodding his head toward the girl in the cubby.

"Chu Fan offers fifteen hundred," said Tumtum, turning to Katimura. "You h'ist that, Willie?"

Willie Katimura was figuring a wad of bills in his waistcoat pocket. "She's Jap girl," he said. "I want her. I give seventeen hundred fifty dollars.

"I pay three hundred now. I get the rest from Nippon Bank, pay you right away."

"Seventeen fifty," said Tumtum half to himself. "Not so bad. That gives me seven hundred and fifty to go on instead of six. Not so bad. They is sure something in signs. Unlucky in love, lucky at cards. I swear."

Chu Fan again plucked at Tumtum's sleeve. Chu Fan was going to raise Katimura's offer. And Chu Fan had the cash.

"Tumtum, I give—"

"No use raising, Chu Fan. No. She's mine, Sei Densu is. Yeah. I aim to keep her. Maybe not like you think though.

"Sei Densu hain't happy over her lay-out, I know she hain't. I seen her face when she come aboard. Got to be one happy soul wind up this voyage. It can't be me, seems like. Maybe it can be Sei Densu. Yeah.

"She hain't for sale, Sei Densu. I aim to take her up Sound, lodge her in with my boarding-house keeper, Mrs. Ferguson. Then little Cherry Blossom can look her hand over leisurelike, figure what she wants to do. When she gets ready to marry, why, she's going to draw to her own hand. Yeah."

The hovered figure had clasped its face in its hands. The shoulders clad in the flowered obi shook convulsively.

"Don't you be 'fraid, little Cherry Blossom," encouraged Tumtum as he started to open the slatted door. "Don't be afraid. Nothing going to hurt you. Come on, now, Cherry."

The figure crouched back against the wall. Tumtum turned fiercely upon Chu Fan and Willie Katimura.

"You two beat it out of here," directed Tumtum ominously. "Beat it! *Klatawa!* Ramble before I start quellin' down the yellow peril!"

Chu Fan and Willie Katimura, who had seen Tumtum Teller in action, promptly *klatawad*.

"Come on, Cherry Blossom, don't you be 'fraid."

He threw the slatted door wide open. Clad in a flowered, silk obi, Lillian Hendricks ran, flung her arms about Tumtum's neck. There she clung and clung, and all she could say through happy tears was the name, "Tumtum," that means, "courage, honesty, a clean, stanch heart," the name bestowed in prescience and wisdom by her father, old Heavo Hendricks.

"Tumtum," she said finally, standing with averted face, two spots of red burning upon her cheeks, "I—Sei Densu went ashore with aunt, dressed in my clothes. I'm going to take her home for a while.

"I—when she told me how she had been sold, seven hundred and fifty dollars,

to a man she didn't know, never had seen, I—I just couldn't stand it, Tumtum. The way you spoke of her, the little, friendless Japanese girl, Tumtum, that was noble, chivalrous, knightly."

Knights, Tumtum had an idea, were always bold, so he took Lillian in his arms, whispered in her ear that he had won a girl in a flowered obi and proposed to keep her forever and ever.

And Lillian didn't say "no." After a moment, with an air of proprietorship, authority that delighted Tumtum's heart, Lillian ordered him to fetch her a long raincoat from the hurricane deck cabin, then proceed to his own cabin, and get into some decent clothes.

"Aunt will be waiting, aunt and Sei Densu in a taxi, Tumtum. Aunt don't know you are coming, too, Tumtum. Really, you know, Tumtum, aunt never saw you dressed up. I want you—"

Tumtum, grinning broadly, sprang up the companionway to execute the orders of the daughter of Heavo Hendricks.

I WANT TO WRITE A POEM—

BY MARGARET E. SANGSTER

I WANT to write a poem to my beloved,
 (I have written other poems
 To other beloveds!)

I want to tell her that her eyes
 Are as blue as the sea;
 And that her lips
 Are a scarlet lure,
 And that the touch of her hand
 On mine
 Is as thrilling
 As music.

I want to write a poem to my beloved;
 (I have written other poems
 To other beloveds!)

But, gosh,
 This beloved knows more about verse
 Than I do.
 The popular magazines
 Pay twenty-five cents a line
 For the stuff
 She writes.

The Stray Man

By Charles Alden Seltzer.

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Square Deal Sanderson," "The Trail Horde," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

TAYLOR NELSON, known everywhere on the range as Shorty, although he is a giant in stature, cannot forget that in battle with outlaws some months back, his pal, Larry Dillon, was slain treacherously from the rear by Brail Kelton, of Blondy Antrim's band. Having bided his time for vengeance he finally decided this had arrived, and on Governor Kane Lawler's horse, Red King, presented to him by the Governor whose service on the ranch he was leaving, he set out to find Kelton and exact it. Coming to a water-hole he looked up from drinking to find himself gazing into the eyes of a girl. She had been thrown from her horse, who had escaped, and was resting beside the water-hole, helpless. Deciding Shorty was a man she could trust, she had accepted his offer to let him carry her, with Red King, to her father's ranch, some twenty miles distant, when they both caught the sound of creaking saddle-leather and could see dimly outlined in the dusk the figure of a man on a horse.

CHAPTER V.

A MAN CHANGES HIS MIND.

SHORTY was aware of the girl's eagerness. One of her hands was on his left arm, the fingers gripping the sleeve of his shirt. She was trembling—he could feel it. The emotion that had seized her was expectancy, of course, for there was no doubt that she thought the newcomer her father, come in search of her.

Had the girl been able to see Shorty's face she would have seen disappointment depicted there, for Shorty likewise believed the man to be her father. And Shorty had looked forward with much pleasure to the twenty-mile ride with the girl as his companion.

However, Shorty was taking no chances. He had lived long in the country, and he had yet to be caught unprepared. So he gently slipped out of the girl's grasp and stepped a little to one side, thus providing space for a quick movement in either direction, should the rider prove hostile.

Silently they waited—Shorty, the girl, and Red King. Red King, trained to range work, and intelligent beyond the average, merely flicked his ears erect as the rider continued to come forward.

Some embers of the fire still glowed dully. The horseman rode directly toward them, and when he reached a point within twenty or thirty yards of the dying fire, he raised both hands above his head. His horse had come to a halt.

"Howdy," he said, his voice low and steady. "I hope I ain't buttin' in on anybody's private business. But I seen your fire back on the desert a piece; an' I rode over, thinkin' mebbe you'd seen a girl I've been lookin' for. I figured—since she'd lost her hoss—that she'd likely strike for the Kelso water-hole—that bein' the nearest water."

The darkness was dense; Shorty was convinced that the man could not see the girl and himself; though the man, on the sky line, was dimly outlined to their view.

Shorty did not answer. He was waiting

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for the girl to speak, expecting her to recognize the man as her father.

The eager exclamation for which Shorty waited did not come. The girl was silent; and Shorty knew the man was not her father. Shorty was about to speak, when the girl's voice came, with a note of undoubted belligerence:

"Tim Blandell, did father send you to look for me?"

The man cruckled deeply. In the sound was heavy derision.

"So you're here—eh?" he said. "Well, I thought I'd find you here. There's somebody with you—eh? I'm askin' permission to let my hands down—this position ain't in no ways comfortable."

"Keep 'em up!" advised Shorty tersely. "Seems to me I heard the lady askin' a question. I'd answer it before I got to takin' liberties with a stranger's hospitality."

"The lady's got company—eh?" mocked the other. "I didn't expect that—for a fact. Speakin' straight—an' to the lady," he added, with sarcastic emphasis—"your dad didn't send me to look for you, though when I left the Circle Star he was mighty upset because you hadn't come in. I'd rode over, to find him complainin' about that knee he hurt last summer, an' worryin' about you. I told him I'd nose around."

"Your dad said you'd rode west. About five miles northeast I run into your hoss. That was a while ago. By followin' his tracks I come to where he'd throwed you; an' then I trailed you here, knowin' you'd be after water."

"And my horse?" The girl's voice was challenging. "Why didn't you bring him?"

"Lame," said the man shortly. There was a note of insincerity in his voice, detected by Shorty, who instantly conceived a dislike for the man, though he had not yet seen his face.

The insincerity was noted by the girl also.

"Billy wasn't lame when he left me," she declared; "he ran away fast enough."

The man laughed. "Well, things don't always stay the way we leave them, I reckon. Billy's left fore-hoof looked as though he might have twisted it on a rock. He was headin' toward the Circle Star—an'

I didn't stop him. My hoss will carry two."

Shorty could not see the girl's face, but he felt her turn toward him; heard the rustle of her skirts as she stepped up to him.

He stood rigid as he felt the girl's hand on his arm, and heard her voice, whispering in his ear:

"Mr. Nelson, I am afraid of Blandell. If it isn't too much trouble, I'd rather ride home with you."

There it was again—evidence of the girl's trust in him. Men had trusted Shorty—men like Kane Lawler and his old friend Larry Dillon—and he had known what such trust meant. Nor could he deny that he knew what was meant by the girl's confidence in him. He would never abuse it.

He yielded, however, to the thrill that surged through him; and he stood for an instant, his muscles leaping, his heart pounding hard with delight.

He kept his voice low, though; and the leap in it was barely noticeable. And he spoke—to her—in a whisper:

"If that's the way you feel, ma'am, I reckon you'll go home with me."

And then his lips set with a humorous grin, for he had been afraid the girl would choose to go with the stranger.

He left the girl's side and walked some distance toward the newcomer, so that his low voice carried to the other.

"You're Tim Blandell, eh? Well, Blandell, I reckon you've made a mistake in your hoss."

"Meanin'?" gruffly said the other.

"Meanin' that he don't look a heap strong—not near powerful enough to carry two—especially when one is a woman."

"Meanin' that she's choosin' to ride with you?" came Blandell's voice.

"Meanin' the other way round, Blandell. She's some undecided, bein' partial to your style of beauty. But I'm pressin' my case, havin' first call. The lady is ridin' with me, an' I ain't yearnin' a heap for no other company. I reckon that ought to make it mighty plain to you."

There was a short silence. Then came Blandell's voice, burdened with rage unmistakable:

"Yes," he said; "that makes it mighty

plain. *Mighty plain.* She rides into the desert, headin' for the Kelso water-hole. Her hoss throws her, an' she gits to the water-hole in time to meet a hombre who'll let her ride home with him. Mebbe she'll ride home with him. An' mebbe—the water-hole bein' off the trail, an' no one a visitin' it regular, there wouldn't be no ridin' done at all to-night!"

Blandell's voice caught in his throat as words about to be uttered were sucked back by the swift intaking of his breath. From a point somewhere in the darkness ahead of him a huge body moved like a black bolt. Blandell sensed the movement and threw his right hand downward toward his gun holster. The hand closed around the butt of the pistol.

But there it stayed; held there by a huge hand whose fingers encircled it like a band of iron. For Shorty's last leap had taken him astride Blandell's horse. He was behind Blandell, and one of his big arms was around Blandell's neck, the wrist under the man's chin, bending his head back until it seemed his neck must break under the strain; while the other hand was crushing the bones in Blandell's pistol hand.

The horse, snorting with fright and sagging from the weight on his back, was plunging in eccentric circles to escape his burden, while Blandell, cursing malignantly, was trying to shake off the swift retribution that had leaped upon him out of the darkness.

The gun came out of Blandell's holster, but Blandell's paralyzed arm contributed nothing to the movement. The gun fell from his nerveless fingers as it cleared the holster and dropped into the dust of the slope, while Blandell, centering his efforts in an attempt to escape the terrible pressure at his throat, twisted and squirmed and cursed.

Blandell's breath was shut off. He felt himself being dragged sidewise, and he kicked his feet free of the stirrups lest he fall and be dragged by the horse. And then he was pulled out of the saddle by a force that would not be denied, and thrown headlong to the ground.

From her position near Red King the girl had watched the fight. She had been

startled by the sudden attack; though she had seen Shorty's movement toward Blandell long before the latter had become aware of it. Blandell had been above her while on his horse, and a little patch of sky—velvet blue—behind him, had caused his figure to stand out plainly.

And so it had been with Shorty when he had moved away from her. His huge figure had been outlined by the little patch of sky at the instant he had begun talking to Blandell; and she had seen him leap at Blandell's insult.

Blandell's horse had sensed the movement before his rider, and had wheeled in affright, thus making possible Shorty's final leap to the animal's back.

And now that the fight had ended so abruptly, the girl stood near Red King, holding her breath and wondering at the remarkable strength and agility displayed by the big man who had championed her.

She knew Shorty was the victor in the fight. She saw him, a black silhouette in the patch of blue sky, standing, his head bent downward as he looked at the huddled figure at his feet. She heard his voice—it was low, deliberate; there was not a trace of excitement in it:

"I reckon you're feelin' a bit flustered—eh, Blandell? Well—get up!"

The girl saw Blandell's figure rise into the blue patch. His was limp; he swayed back and forth. And then came Shorty's voice again:

"The lady you've slandered is standin' pretty close, Blandell. If you're figurin' that she's waitin' for you to act the man you won't be a heap wrong. I'd make it short, though."

"Mebbe I wasn't meanin' just what I said," mumbled Blandell thickly.

Shorty laughed. He turned and addressed the girl.

"Knowin' this hombre better than I know him, ma'am, would you call that a proper speech? Or shall I have him make it stronger?"

"That will be sufficient—if you please."

"I reckon that 'll be all, Blandell," came Shorty's voice. "Your hoss is kind of figity. If I was you I wouldn't make him wait too long. He wants to be goin'."

Blandell said nothing. The girl saw him walk to his horse, climb into the saddle and ride into the darkness beyond the crest of the slope. She saw Shorty walk to this same crest and watch Blandell. After a time she saw Shorty turn and come toward her. When he reached her it seemed she could feel the grim humor that gripped him—it was expressed in his voice when he said, slowly:

"It don't take much to make some men change their minds—does it, ma'am?"

CHAPTER VI.

STICKING TO THE DEFINITE OBJECT.

THE gray light of dawn was in the east when Shorty halted Red King at the edge of a little clearing in a timber grove. Before him was a collection of small buildings which, he suspected, belonged to the father of the girl he had brought from the water-hole. Shorty reached that conclusion of his own accord, for the girl was asleep in his arms, having succumbed several miles back.

Shorty was holding her, as he might have held a child. When she had fallen asleep she had been sitting in front of him, having the saddle to herself; while he had been perched on the war-bag behind the cantle.

When he had noted that she had fallen asleep he had moved closer to her, and when, as Red King had descended a sharp slope, the girl had lurched perilously, Shorty had reached out a steadying hand.

For a long time they had ridden thus—the girl asleep; Shorty steadying her with a hand that rested on one of her shoulders.

Perhaps the position had become tiresome; or it may have been that Shorty feared the girl would tumble off Red King. At any rate they had not traveled much farther when Shorty was in the saddle with the girl lying across his knees.

His movements had not awakened her; and Shorty did not wonder at that. Her experience had been a trying one, and the sleep she had settled into was that of exhaustion.

Shorty had not been able to define the sensations that had beset him during the

ride. He was convinced that he would never be able to define them. He had ridden horses since he had been able to sit upright in a saddle, and he enjoyed riding—he had always enjoyed it. But never had he enjoyed a ride as he enjoyed this one.

It was not his fault that the girl had been hurt; nor was he to blame because she had refused to ride with Blandell. But he was convinced that not a small portion of his joy was in the thought that she had chosen him instead of Blandell.

However, Shorty's joy was not physical. It struck deeper than that. It was a hallowed thing; an emotion that swelled his huge chest with a tender elation that at times awed him with its intensity.

Not for all the riches in the West would Shorty have touched the pale face that was turned to his as it lay against his chest. It was a strange and wonderful experience to him—this of holding a sleeping woman in his arms—a woman who trusted him enough to choose him as her companion on the long ride; who trusted him enough to go to sleep in his presence, with nothing around them but space and the vast silence of the prairies.

The girl had been sleeping for more than an hour. Shorty's arms were beginning to feel the strain. From her description of the Circle Star he was convinced that they had at last reached their destination, but after bringing Red King to a halt, Shorty did not move.

He sat, silently regarding the upturned face, noting—as he had noted before in the growing light—how her hair, in glistening, golden, graceful disorder, framed it. Some distance back he had managed to remove his coat and had covered her with it; so that now only her face and hair were visible to him—if he forgot the short skirt she wore, below which was one ridiculously thin little boot and a bare foot, much swollen.

Her face was near enough for him to breathe the fragrance of her hair; and for an hour Shorty had been wondering about the hair—worshipping it with a reverence that was almost painful.

Shorty told himself that the reason he was delaying was that the girl needed the

rest she was enjoying. She *was* enjoying it, for she was in a state of complete relaxation, limp and passive. Shorty noted how lightly the long, curved eyelashes lay on her cheeks; how her feet—the booted one and the bare one—dangled over Red King's side with a limp abandon that was eloquent of complete surrender to physical weariness.

And Shorty told himself that the cause of his delay in awakening her was merely compassion. He knew she needed rest. But deep within him lurked another reason—he wanted to continue to look at her while she slept.

And so he did not awaken her. He sat there long, looking at her, while the eastern light grew stronger and the night shadows began to lift.

He had looked toward the buildings, searching for signs of life. He saw no such signs. The door of the ranch-house was open; but no smoke came from the adobe chimney, and there was about the place an atmosphere of dead calm which seemed to hint of the absence of human beings.

The girl's father, Shorty decided, had gone to search for her. He was wondering what direction the man had taken, when he again looked downward, to see the girl looking straight up at him with astonished, bewildered eyes.

Shorty smiled at her, and into her eyes came recollection, swift, complete.

"Oh!" she said; "I've been asleep!"

"I reckon I'd call it that," agreed Shorty. "You went to sleep settin' in the saddle. I was afraid you'd fall out of it. You've been hittin' it off pretty deep for more than an hour."

"Let me up—please!"

She struggled to an erect position; and Shorty squirmed back to the war-bag, stretching his numbed muscles.

"Why—we're home!" exclaimed the girl.

Shorty smiled, enjoying the girl's delight. He slipped down from Red King, moving slowly, and grinned up at her.

"Seems like there's nobody around, ma'am," he said. "It's likely your dad set out to look for you—after Blandell went away."

"Dad always worries about me," she smiled.

There was embarrassment in the look she gave him—subtle inquiry. Shorty met her gaze with a steadiness that caused her eyes to glow with frank gratefulness. He knew what her look meant; she was thanking him for the honorable treatment he had accorded her while she had been asleep in his arms.

She started to get down; but his voice halted her:

"I wouldn't walk on that foot any more than I could help, ma'am. Red King will carry you to the house."

Red King did carry her. Shorty helped her to dismount at the edge of a little porch at the rear of the ranch-house; and again—for a thrilling instant—Shorty held the girl in his arms.

He could not have told what emotion caused her to blush as she rested for a moment in his grasp; but there was no mistaking the sensation that assailed him.

But he affected steadiness, and smiled at her.

"I reckon that's all, ma'am; I'll be moseyin' along."

"Won't you wait until father returns?" she asked. "I should like to have him thank you for what you have done for me—I am sure he will be disappointed if he does not see you!"

"I'll be back, ma'am; I'm not goin' far. Only to Loma."

"Oh!" she said; "then you intend to stay for a time in this section?"

"A little while, anyway," he said gravely; thinking of Larry Dillon. "You see, ma'am, my vacation is pretty nearly over—I've been loafin' quite a spell. If I can hook up to some outfit around here, I'll likely do it. If I can't, I'll drift."

"Our ranch isn't very big," she said, looking away from him; "and we don't employ many men. But I heard father say he needs another man. If you'd wait until he comes—"

"I'm thankin' you, ma'am," he said. "Maybe I'll be back to have a talk with your dad."

He would have stayed, for he could have wished for nothing better than to secure

work where he might be able to see her often; but he had set out from the Lawler ranch with a definite object in view, and he did not purpose to let anything—not even this girl who had so completely captivated him—dissuade him from his vengeance.

Loma—that was where he might find Brail Kelton; at least, before he did anything else he meant to have a look at the citizens of the town. Then—if he could not find Kelton there—he would return to the Circle Star to accept the job that he felt would be offered him.

He turned toward Red King. The girl's voice halted him.

"You must be hungry; won't you wait until I get some breakfast?"

Shorty gravely considered the girl. He was aware that he might easily presume upon the kindness she had proffered. He had done her a service, of course, and she felt obligated to him. But he did not care to have her repay the obligation in that manner; and he was convinced that by refusing the invitation to breakfast he would keep alive that interest which she had plainly betrayed. He was interested in her, also, but he knew that he must not permit her to know the depth of that interest. He had never loved a woman before, but his instinct told him that he must not appear too eager, lest she gain the impression that he was pursuing her.

"I reckon I'll be gettin' on to Loma, ma'am. 'It's only ten miles. I think you told me that."

"Yes—only ten miles."

He saw disappointment in her eyes and a new thrill swept over him; and yet he persisted in his determination to decline the hospitality she had offered him. It was the first time in his life that any woman had betrayed interest in him—at least the sort of interest she was betraying—and the voice of wisdom told him that he must not yield or permit her to see that he knew of her interest.

"I reckon I'll go to Loma, ma'am," he said gently. "But I'm thankin' you just the same. It's likely I'll come back, an' then you'll have me to feed regular—an' be gettin' tired of me."

She had nothing to say to that; but she

stood on the little porch and watched him as he mounted the big red horse and rode away.

At a little distance he turned in the saddle and waved a hand to her; and she replied to it, her face suffused with color that he did not see.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER AT LOMA.

SHORTY rode leisurely into the level grass land that stretched toward Loma. Certain thoughts occupied him—mental pictures that would not fade.

He kept seeing the girl as he had seen her when he had first caught sight of her at the water-hole; and he was convinced that he would always see her as she had appeared to him then. He had another vivid recollection of her as she had lain in his arms during the latter part of the ride to the Circle Star, which would be unforgettable.

He discovered that a subtle change had come over him; that for the first time in his life he was concerned over a woman. She had treated him as no other woman had ever treated him; and he was certain that he had seen regret in her eyes when he had insisted on leaving the Circle Star.

How was he to interpret her manner? Was he to think that she liked him, or had she merely been gracious to him as a means of repaying him for the service he had done her?

Shorty's thoughts were not shot with fatuous imaginings. He was never more serious in his life, for he knew that if he yielded to the strange longing that possessed him it meant that he would break faith with Larry Dillon. If he yielded to the lure of the girl he would have to give up his search for Brail Kelton—unless he found Kelton in the vicinity.

And Shorty knew that there was danger that he would give up the search for Kelton. Already he was seeking justification for the action. As he rode into the distance toward Loma he kept telling himself that he would have to discontinue the search for Kelton, temporarily, at least. His money

was running low; he was getting shabby; and there must come a halt while he earned enough to enable him to go on.

To be sure he had some cash left; but it would not last much longer. He might as well work for the Circle Star as to continue his wanderings, and at last get a job farther east. The necessity for work would finally prove imperative.

And yet Shorty knew that the real reason for his inclination to delay at the Circle Star was the girl he had met at the water-hole. He knew that if he had not met her he would have kept going eastward until he found Kelton or until the last coin in the bag Lawler had given him had gone the way of the others. As it was there was still money in the bag—enough to have enabled him to travel some distance, conceding he would be as careful with it as he had been until now—and Shorty knew he was not considering the money at all.

He grinned guiltily as he rode, mentally seeking vindication for a decision already made.

"It ain't as though I'd called it off," he mused. "I'm goin' on again after a while. Why, I reckon it's human nature for a man to like a woman. Things like that are bound to come along—Larry 'll know how it is."

There, too, was still the hope that he might find Brail Kelton in the vicinity of Loma. Certainly he would not have neglected to search for Kelton in the neighborhood even if he had not met the girl at the water-hole.

He rode on, convinced that he was not cheating Larry by delaying for a time, feeling lighter of heart now that he had established a defense against the attacks of conscience. He would return to the Circle Star—after he had combed Loma in search of Kelton.

Half-way to Loma he reached a slope that took him to the bed of a shallow river. He dismounted, turned Red King into some tall grass near the water's edge; built a fire with some dried mesquite; unrolled his slicker and got out his cooking utensils. After he placed the coffee-pot on the fire he found a deep hole in the river and bathed himself, emerging from the cold

water dripping, glowing, and with a keen hunger gnawing at him.

He was still in no hurry. The sun was high when he finally left the river, heading again into the eastern distance.

Once out of the shallow valley he reached the plains once more, and about mid-morning came in sight of the town.

He had seen many towns like Loma; and there was little curiosity in his eyes as he rode between two rows of frame shanties that had been built with little or no regard for appearances. Over Loma's buildings had settled the dust of many seasons; their fronts were seamed and cracked from exposure to the weather; in side and rear were mounds of refuse—an affront to the esthetic traveler who occasionally visited the place; accepted as a matter of course by residents of the section.

Shorty rode to about the center of town, bringing Red King to a halt at a hitching-rail in front of a building which bore a sign:

LOMA EATING HOUSE

Shorty was conscious that the gaze of many men followed him as he dismounted. Many horses were standing at hitching-rails in front of various buildings; the doors of saloons yawned open, with men lounging on their thresholds and draping benches along their fronts; there were other men in groups on the hard-beaten sand that formed a sidewalk.

Shorty paid little attention to Loma's citizens. Since he had left Lawler's ranch he had visited many towns, and invariably he had undergone the staring of the curious with much the same indifference he exhibited now.

But while Shorty had been riding down Loma's one street the words of the stranger he had talked with recurred to him:

"Loma ain't none nice as regards morals. It's likely folks in Loma never heard the word. Loma ain't a town—it's a sink-hole where all the scum in the country gathers. If you're headin' that way you want to ride careful an' keep lookin' behind you. You want to talk soft an' polite. There's a hell-blazin' crowd in Loma that 'll salivate you if they don't like the way you hold your mouth."

Shorty had seen that the stranger had accurately described Loma's citizens. In his swift glance at the men he had passed Shorty noted the sneering truculence of the eyes that had followed his progress; he had observed the envious, longing glances some of the men had cast at Red King. He had also noted that the members of two or three groups had seemed to be discussing the red horse, for they had betrayed interest beyond the ordinary as they talked.

Shorty's movements were deliberate. He tied Red King to the hitching-rail and stepped toward the door of the eating-house, intending to make his first inquiry about Brail Kelton there. He might have stopped at one of the many saloons he had passed while riding down the street, but he did not feel in the mood to drink. When he had seen the eating-house sign he had decided that as he might be in Loma several days pursuing his quest for Kelton he would make immediate arrangements for his lodging.

When he halted Red King in front of the building he had noticed a man who stood before one of the windows. The man was alone, and when Shorty glanced at him he got the impression that the man was not a citizen of Loma. At the instant Shorty could not have told why he had reached such a conclusion. It might have been the man's attitude, or the fact that he was alone, when he might have joined one of the groups farther down the street.

The man was tall, lithe, with a lean, strong, saturnine face. He was arrayed in cowboy rigging, with a heavy pistol swinging low at each hip; and he had the appearance of having encountered adversity. But that, too, was a flashing impression resulting from a first survey.

The man's broad felt hat was pulled well down over his eyes. But Shorty's first glance had met the man's eyes, and he had noted how they were fixed upon him with a steady directness—a probing, inquiring, appraising gaze that interested Shorty.

Shorty glanced at the man a second time as he started to cross the sidewalk. The man was still watching Shorty. His arms were folded over his chest, and now

there was a slight smile on his lips, genial, warming.

Shorty's lips twitched responsively. There were few men of Shorty's acquaintance whom he had liked at first sight. This man Shorty did like. He liked the smile. Somehow, it reminded him of Larry Dillon. And the man had the same trick of squinting his eyes to indicate his pleasure. And pleasure was plain in his glance as he looked at Shorty.

Shorty paused on his way to the eating-house door. He met the man's growing grin with one equally large.

"That's a heap of hoss you're ridin', stranger," said the man.

His grin grew whimsical. "Was he always that red? I've been watchin' you comin' for a considerable time. Thought at first the grass had caught fire."

"I didn't notice that you was any excited about it," grinned Shorty. "Ridin' in I had to look twice at you to make sure you wasn't a hitchin'-post. You sure can do a heap of standin' still."

The man laughed heartily. "You're sure an' observin' cuss," he said. "I figured that if I stood here long enough I'd get another whiff off them ham an' aigs that's been floatin' out of the door pretty regular this mornin'."

Shorty shot a keen glance at the other.

"Luck an' you parted company?" he suggested, gently.

"Somebody must have told you," grinned the man.

Shorty had eaten his fill at his camp beside the river, a few miles from town. He had not intended to partake of more food this morning. But he now placed a hand gently on his stomach.

"You're pretty certain they sling ham an' aigs in this joint?" he asked.

"I've been breathin' 'em since yesterday," said the man.

"You're makin' it hard for me," lied Shorty, grinning hugely. "My grub ran out yesterday afternoon an' I ain't done any eatin' since. Ham an' aigs 'is about my size. An' I eat better when I've got company. If I could get some one to kind of keep me on edge, sort of competin' with me as to quantity, I'd be sure to eat

a regular meal. If you ain't got no previous engagement—"

Shorty's pause was eloquent.

Ten minutes later, at a table in the eating-house, the stranger was demonstrating that despite their disparity in size his own capacity for food was astonishingly greater than that of his host. In fact, Shorty ate very little. He manfully attempted to finish his portion, though, and his failure was observed by the other who, after finishing, grinned oddly at him.

"Grub played out—eh?" he said. "Was you tellin' me it was yesterday?"

"My appetite ain't none reliable," lied Shorty, grinning.

"It's happened twice," said the man. "Once in Canada del Oro—an' now. There's been a heap of prosperity in between. I reckon a man hadn't ought to kick."

"Driftin'?" questioned Shorty.

"Lookin' for a job. Breezed into Loma the day before yesterday—from Dry Bottom. Outfits all filled. Headin' west. A guy was tellin' me last night that a rancher about ten miles west, is wantin' a couple of men.

"There's a gang here would have staked me, if I'd been minded to throw in with them—rustlers, tin-horns. It ain't in my line. This hombre"—he jerked a thumb toward the eating-house proprietor, who was bending over a stove in the rear of the room—"got mighty chilly when he found out I wasn't throwin' in with the gang. I'd been eatin' up till then."

"Your hoss eatin'?"

"Eatin' his head off. In the livery-stable. I'm owin' the stable boss five dollars. When I heard of this job I offered him my smoke pole for security. He wouldn't even look at it. Figurin' I'd hoof it out of town or starve to death, I reckon. Then the hoss would be his'n. I was figurin' to go down an' bust his head—when I seen your hoss blazin' toward town. Glad I waited."

Shorty laid a gold piece on the table between them. "I'd go get my hoss an' hit the breeze to that job," he suggested. "Where did you say it was?"

"At the Circle Star," said the man. He picked up the gold piece. "I'm thankin'

you. If you're hangin' around here for a spell I'll be handin' this back to you."

He got up, started toward the door; returned and whispered to Shorty:

"You ain't greenhorn," he said; "an' you look as though you knowed how to sling them two guns. But I'd step mighty soft. That's a heap of hoss you've got out there, an' there's guys in this section that 'll want him. They're a thievin', sneakin', murderin' gang, an' you've got a big back, mister."

After the man's departure, Shorty walked to the counter and paid the bill. He bought a cigar and stood for some time reflectively smoking, thinking of the stranger he had just breakfasted with.

The girl had not been lying about her father wanting men. He had entertained a secret hope that she had said that merely to keep him near her. Somehow, he had wished she had. The fact that the stranger was going there to work—that her father really wanted men—seemed to remove some of the romance from his adventure with her, gave to the incident a matter of fact atmosphere which placed an effectual damper on his self-conceit.

"Shucks!" he grinned, puffing slowly at his cigar. "When do you reckon you got to be a lady-killer, Shorty? Them airs you've been takin' on is quite recent, I've heard. You've sort of got all twisted around. She was tellin' the truth, an' you thought she was yearnin' for you. Shucks!"

"Was you sayin' somethin'?"

It was the voice of the proprietor—a fat man, who was now standing behind the counter, one elbow upon it, watching Shorty with some curiosity.

Shorty turned. He grinned widely at the fat man.

"Was you hearin' me?" he asked, gently.

"Seems I heard you sayin' somethin' about a woman."

"A little woman," smiled Shorty. "A little woman with a lot of hair an' plenty of eyes. She's been pokin' fun at me, I reckon. She didn't mean it."

The fat man blankly surveyed Shorty; then scratched his head and sardonically moved his right hand in the vicinity of his

right ear, as though in the act of turning a crank.

"Loco!" he sneered. "Plumb loco! I reckon you've been minglin' with a hydrophobia pole-cat."

"Yes," said Shorty, gently; "I reckon I have. But I'm goin' to leave him now."

The fat man reddened; his face bloating with rage. But he made no hostile movement as Shorty turned to the door and stepped down into the street.

"Mebbe she don't think a heap of me, after all," Shorty called back to the fat man; "but I reckon she wouldn't want you to treat my friends mean—when they're yearnin' for ham an' aigs."

His last glance at the fat man revealed that bewildered individual weakly leaning on the counter. He was evidently futilely wrestling with the puzzling mystery Shorty had left with him.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL ABOUT A DOG.

WHEN Shorty reached the street there was a broad grin on his face.

"Helen," he said: "Helen. Even her name is pretty." He walked over to Red King and patted his glowing mane. The animal whinnied, and Shorty smiled broadly at him.

"You didn't expect she'd have an ugly one, did you, you blazin' chump." He leaned against the horse and looked reflectively back into the eating-house. His eyes sobered. "Mebbe he *did* have grounds?" he suggested.

He looked down the street toward the east. His guest at breakfast had taken that direction. Not far from him he saw the front of the livery stable. There was no sign of the stranger.

Shorty intended to stable Red King; but there was plenty of time. The horse had cropped his fill of gramma grass at the river, and noon was not far away.

Shorty leaned against the hitching-rail, lazily surveying Loma. The shabby, disreputable appearance of the town disgusted him. He was also disgusted with the character of Loma's citizens—chiefly, with the

one he had already met—the eating-house proprietor.

From where he stood he could see many other residents. They were a vicious looking lot. He saw a large group in front of a building unmistakably occupied as a saloon. A hitching-rail skirted the front and was heavily fringed with men. Half a dozen others were seated on the steps that led to the barroom; others were draped on a bench in front of the place; and still others were standing.

Shorty's first glance at the group was casual. He had merely looked at the men because his gaze, in roving over the buildings, had happened to rest upon them. Disgust, contempt, curved his lips as he continued to watch the men.

Almost instantly his lips straightened and his eyes narrowed—with interest, grim and cold.

A big man sitting on the step in front of the door of the saloon held a dog between his knees. The dog was of nondescript breed, but some one had thought enough of him to place a collar around his neck—a strap with some metal spangles and beads planted on it. The big man's fingers were gripping the collar, his knees were pressing hard upon the dog's body, while the animal was making frantic efforts to escape.

Shorty was not more than fifty feet from the group of men, and he could see the distress, the frenzy and the impotent rage exhibited by the animal in its attempts to escape the clutch of the big man.

Every man in the group was laughing—their guffaws shattered the quiet of the street with a resonance that brought heads out of windows. Evidently they were hugely amused. But Shorty did not share in their amusement.

For he saw a boy standing near the edge of the group. He was not more than eight or nine years old. He was shoeless, his bare feet were stained darkly with dirt that seemed to have been accumulating for days; trousers that were much too long and loose were caught over one of his shoulders with what had once been a section of a pair of broad, cotton suspenders. He was hatless, his face unwashed and his hair unkempt. But he had a cherubic face,

with color that glowed beneath the dirt upon it; and flashing black eyes that were gleaming with resentment as he looked at the big man.

Plainly the thing that amused the men in the group was tragedy to the boy. He had evidently been passing the group when the big man had seized the dog; and when Shorty saw him first he was shaking a fist at the big man, while his thin voice rose shrilly:

"Let go of that dog, you damned maverick!" he screamed.

His voice betrayed the frenzied rage that gripped him. But it was a rage that narrowly verged upon tears, for there was a break in his tones that betrayed their presence. The dog renewed his efforts to escape, growling, and slashing vainly at the hands that held him.

"Come on, Rags!" called the boy. "Come on. Bite the damned fool! Bite him!"

There was a shout of hoarse laughter from the men as the dog vainly tried to obey his young master. But though he tore at the earth with ripping, slashing feet, squirming and writhing with frantic eagerness, the man held him.

A dozen times the scene was reenacted. Twice the man seemed about to permit the dog to escape, but as the animal leaped he tightened his hold and laughed with the others at the dog's futile struggles. After each tantalizing performance the boy's rage increased.

He was crying now—shamelessly betraying the fear that possessed him—fear that the man did not intend to let the dog escape.

The faces of women appeared in near-by windows disapproval written large upon them. The big man merely laughed.

It seemed to Shorty as he silently watched the pitiable drama, that the men in the group might have occupied their time to better advantage. If this was their idea of enjoyment they betrayed a depraved mentality.

And yet in a section of country so primitive as this the sport could not be termed rough. It seemed they meant no harm to the boy or dog; it was merely their

intention—at least, it appeared to be the intention of the man who held the dog—to torment the boy to a point where he would entirely lose his self-control. Proof on that score came presently, when a man at the edge of the group near Shorty, spoke:

"He'll git to cussin' regular, pretty quick. There ain't a man in the country got anything on him!"

The dog was still raging. His fangs were bared, his upper lip laid back; his ears close to his head, and his eyes were blazing with a wild malignance. The man's grip on his neck was so tight and the hands placed so cunningly that no matter which way he turned his head the dog could not reach them with his slashing fangs.

The boy began to scream curses at the man; the rage reflected in his eyes equaled that betrayed by the dog. Stooping suddenly he picked up a jagged piece of rock, hurling it with all his strength at the man who held the dog.

The man had been looking at the animal when the stone left the boy's hand, and the missile, thrown with unerring aim, struck him on the top of the head, knocking his hat off.

The suddenness of the attack disconcerted the man momentarily. Involuntarily he threw up one hand to grasp the hat. The movement gave the dog the opportunity he had been fighting for, and he twisted around, burying his fangs deep in the man's hand.

The man rose. He paid no more attention to the hat—which had fallen at his feet. He stood up, his face dark with rage; holding the dog by the collar with one hand, so that the animal dangled, squirming and twisting, and still raging furiously.

The man looked at the hand, saw blood pouring from the flesh where the dog's fangs had torn it; and reached for the heavy pistol at his right hip.

A deep silence greeted the movement. But if there were men in the group who were opposed to the act of brutality that impended, they gave no sign. There were shouts of protest from various points farther down the street, but these were un-

heeded. The boy, though, aware of the danger to his pet, started forward, shrieking profanely. A man in the group seized him and drew him back.

The big man lowered the dog until the animal was dangling close to the ground with its legs wildly threshing. It was the man's intention to shoot the dog through the head, for the heavy pistol grew rigid in his hand, the muzzle close to the animal's ear.

And then, just when it seemed that the deed was about to be consummated, a cold voice rose above the dog's now terrified snarls:

"It ain't such a hell of a lot of fun, after all, is it?"

There was a pause; the man holding the dog looked up to see a tawny giant within half a dozen steps of him, watching him steadily.

"I reckon that ends this deal," the giant went on. "It's your own fault. You deviled him into bitin' you, an' you ain't goin' to kill him. Drop him!"

The man's grip on the dog's collar loosened. He did not seem to be aware of the action. The dog, striking the ground, whirled savagely at his tormentor, slashed at the boot nearest him, failed to penetrate the tough leather; and then scampered to his owner, yelping delightedly.

But the man paid no attention to boy or dog. He was looking at the man who had interfered—watching him with eyes that told of mental uneasiness.

"Who in hell are you?" he demanded.

Shorty grinned coldly, started, and looked keenly at the other. "I camped last night at Kelso's water-hole, Blandell. Do you reckon you can remember anythin' that took place that far back?"

Blandell was rigid. There was a light in his eyes which told that he now recognized Shorty. There was hate in his eyes, too.

His gaze roved over Shorty; there was a perceptible quickening of his eyes and a slight movement of his muscles as he noted that Shorty's guns were in their holsters. His lips curved; he stuck his chin out.

"At the Kelso water-hole—er? Well—here's what you've got comin' for—"

He swung his pistol-hand upward. With

the movement he dragged at the trigger. He had meant to shoot from the hip, and he had pulled his elbow back with the upward movement. But before the weapon reached the level Blandell wished it to attain, a heavy boot struck him in the stomach. The gun went off as Blandell doubled forward, the bullet splaying the hard sand at his feet, and Blandell lurched, grunting with pain, into a vicious left swing that caught him full on the point of the jaw.

He was tumbled backward from the force of the blow and sat down heavily, the gun falling from his loosened fingers while he swayed back and forth, gasping for breath.

After the blow Shorty had moved quickly. Aware that Blandell must have friends in the group, he had leaped toward the man's gun, drawing his own as he did so. A swift kick sent Blandell's weapon out of reach; and Shorty wheeled, his muscles tensed, alert, to face the other men by the rail.

They were all on their feet. Shorty had worked so rapidly that the men were taken by surprise; but when Shorty faced them, his two guns stiff in his hands, two or three of the men were reaching toward their holsters.

Shorty slowly backed toward the front of the saloon, his guns menacing all of the men; his eyes blazing the deadliness of his intentions.

He had reached the front of the saloon, where he could not be attacked from the rear, when he heard a voice, coldly drawling:

"Easy there, old-timer. There ain't nobody goin' to herd-ride you. Take care of the big guy an' I'll look after the rest of these tin-horns."

Shorty's quick glance went to the street. He saw his guest at breakfast astride a black horse that stood in the street beyond the hitching-rail. The black horse was facing Shorty and the group of men. His rider, too, was facing Shorty and the others, and a heavy pistol in each of his hands indicated that he was prepared to back his words with action.

There was a humorous, twisting smile on

the face of the man who sat on the black horse; it was evident that he appreciated the delicacy of the situation and had perfect confidence in his ability to keep his promise to prevent the other men from interfering with Shorty. Also, there was that in his manner which told that he was glad to seize this opportunity to harass the members of the group.

Into the silence which had followed his words he poured more. They flowed from his lips in a slow drawl, deliberate, distinct, convincing:

"You yaps with itchin' fingers are goin' to be mighty careful how you move 'em. I'd admire to bust you-all wide open—an' then some. Because why? Because you-all have been so damned hospitable to a stranger. I'm a-yearnin' to make a proper reply to Blandell's invitation to throw in with you-all. I'll make it if one of you scum wiggles one of his sky-hooks a quarter of an inch!"

Shorty threw a grim smile at his friend. He left the building and walked to where Blandell sat, looking down at him. Blandell was recovering; he suddenly got to his feet at Shorty's command, and stood, watching the latter with level, truculent gaze.

Standing in front of Blandell, Shorty slowly sheathed his guns. There was an odd smile on his lips and into his eyes had come an expression that caused Blandell to look sharply at him and then draw back slightly.

"I'm aimin' to see what sort of a man you are, Blandell." Shorty's voice was smooth, quiet; he betrayed no passion; in fact, he seemed to be merely persistently curious.

"When I camp at Kelso's water-hole I meet a lady. I've found out since that her dad owns the Circle Star. Her hoss had run off an' she'd hoofed it to the Kelso water-hole, hopin' somebody would find her there. It happened to be me. You come along after a while an' want to take her home. She prefers to ride home with a gentleman named Taylor Nelson—the same bein' yours truly—which has got a nickname, 'Shorty'.

"So far there ain't nothin' to quarrel

over. It's so damn dark at the water-hole that I can't see your face, an' you can't tell how good lookin' I am. Howsomever, you know I'm a better lookin' guy than you, because the lady has chose me as her escort—refusin' you.

"That gets you sort of riled, an' you say things to the lady that no man ever says to a decent woman. I go for you, figurin' to teach you better manners—an' you try to draw on me. I convince you that tryin' to draw on me is a heap foolish—when I'm close enough to tack a wallop onto you.

"That's once. To-day I find you devilin' a dog—forcin' a quarrel with him. The dog, not knowin' your intentions, an' figurin' to take his own part, claws you up considerable. You want to kill him. I come along an' suggest that killin' the dog ain't proper, an' you try to draw on me again—forgettin' the lesson you got last night.

"Blandell, I ain't no trouble-hunter. I reckon no man can say I ever started anything. But once somethin' is started I usually tag along until it's finished. Leavin' a job half done ain't in my line.

"Blandell, I reckon you know what I mean. You an' me ain't goin' to pack no grudge. What's between us is goin' to be settled one way or another, right now. I'm figurin' to hang around this neck of the woods for a little while, an' I don't want no guy yankin' at his leather that suggestive every time I see him. Go get your gun. She'll go right clever yet—I didn't hurt her by kickin' her. Grab it an' show me how you can sling it. I won't go for mine until you get set."

Blandell had not removed his gaze from Shorty while the latter had been talking. He had seemed to think that Shorty was not entirely in earnest, for part of the time there had been an incredulous sneer on his lips.

Now his gaze wavered and he drew a quick breath, while his face slowly whitened. He made no move to get his weapon, but stood, his hands hanging limply, watching Shorty.

"Not havin' any rapid thoughts, eh, Blandell?" jeered Shorty.

"I'll do my shootin' when I feel like it," mumbled Blandell.

"Yellow—eh?" smiled Shorty. "Well, it's a standin' invitation. But I'm tellin' you this: The next time you go for your gun when I'm around there won't be no sluggin' goin' on. I reckon that's about all for the present."

He grinned widely at the man on the black horse, swept the faces of the men in the group with a glance in which there was a trace of cold amusement; then deliberately turned his back to all of them and walked unconcernedly down the street to where Red King was standing. He mounted Red King and rode off without glancing back.

Dozens of persons watched his progress; and many of those who watched him were rigid with a fear that as he walked one of the men in the group would speed a bullet into his broad back.

But not a man who watched him moved a hand until he reached Red King. And then rose a concerted sigh of relief and admiration.

The man on the black horse laughed jeeringly as he looked at the men in the group around Blandell.

"Nerve?" he said with brevity at once eloquent and significant. "Well, I reckon!"

He laughed again and rode down the street, heading into the west.

A man in the group looked after him, grunting expressively.

"Nerve—eh?" he said. "I reckon there's a pair of 'em."

CHAPTER IX.

SETTING A SCORE.

SHORTY rode Red King to the livery-stable, where he removed the trappings from the animal, rubbed him down; then watered and fed him. While Red King munched his grain Shorty leaned against a door-jamb at the front of the stable reflectively watching what he could see of Loma.

During his pilgrimage he had formed the habit of questioning every man he came in contact with, never concluding a conversation without having mentioned the name, Brail Kelton. Since he had been in

Loma, however, he had talked with three men, not including Blandell. And Brail Kelton's name had not passed his lips.

Shorty was not disloyal to the memory of his friend. The determination to punish Larry's murderer was as strong in him as ever yet this morning he could not keep his mind upon Larry. He flushed guiltily as he realized that the girl of the water-hole had usurped the place in his mind previously occupied by Larry Dillon. As he stood in the doorway his lips moved; low words came from them:

"I reckon Larry will understand. There ain't no use of a man tryin' to fool himself—believin' he's dead set on doin' one thing while all the time he's wantin' to do another. I ain't wantin' to play no hypocrite to Larry. Seems a whole lot like Larry is standin' at my elbow, urgin' me to stay."

And so, convinced that he had settled the matter with Larry, he was satisfied. For an hour or so he lounged at the door of the livery-stable. And toward noon he went again to the eating-house, where he partook sparingly of food, enduring the hostile glances of the fat proprietor with a steady unconcern which wrought malignance upon the countenance of that individual.

Part of the afternoon Shorty passed in a saloon, watching a few of Loma's representative citizens playing cards. Just before dusk he again went to the eating-house, and a little later he was in the livery-stable, throwing saddle and bridle on Red King. And when twilight began to steal over the world he rode Red King out of town, westward, toward the Circle Star.

None of Loma's citizens seemed to be interested in his movements; at least, he saw no one watching him. It was but a step from the edge of town to the vast, dim plains, and in a few minutes he was riding in a virgin world that seemed deserted except for his own presence.

And now that he had definitely determined to return to the Circle Star, he was afflicted with a strange exhilaration, not unmingled with a sensation of grave concern. Was he doing right in going back to her? Would she be glad to see him?

It did not seem to him that it was only this morning that he had left—a matter of hours. For he had crowded much thought into those few hours, filling them with speculation founded upon the possibility of his turning his back upon the Circle Star.

As he rode it grew darker; so dark that he could barely see the trail, a dim, faint line that stretched ahead of him, revealed by the luminous haze from the countless cold, unwinking stars.

After a time he reached the river where he had halted for a brief time that morning. He rode down the sloping bank and dismounted, letting Red King drink while he himself knelt at the edge of the stream and drank from his cupped hands.

He was on his way again presently, refreshed, riding eagerly; and yet aware that he would be exhibiting weakness were he to appear at the Circle Star at night. He had planned to establish himself in one of the bunk-houses after reaching the ranch, intending to pass the night there and to make the girl aware of his presence in the morning. He was certain he would find his guest at breakfast already established on the place.

Gaining the high ground that rose above the river valley, he sent Red King steadily onward. The big horse seemed to be a trifle uneasy as he reached the level; he went forward with a light, wary step, his head held high, nickering and prancing nervously.

For a long time Shorty, profoundly interested in thoughts which did not include the progress of Red King did not notice this. He became aware of Red King's nervousness when the animal wheeled abruptly, endeavoring to face the direction from which he had come.

Thinking that the horse had found his trail disputed by some slinking denizen of the sage, Shorty pulled sharply on the left rein, bringing Red King back to the trail, again facing west.

With the movement Shorty doubled forward, lurching perilously. From a point far behind him—and yet not so far either—not more than hundred yards or so—came

a flame-spurt, a whipping crash; and then a white puff of smoke that ballooned upward to disintegrate almost instantly in the darkness.

"Rifle!" said Shorty thickly.

For an instant he held hard to the saddle-horn with his left hand, while with his right he tried to draw the pistol at his right hip. The hand would not answer the demands of his will; it swept the butt of the weapon, but could not grip it.

Shorty grinned sarcastically.

"I reckon I wasn't watchin' my business, King," he said to the horse. "He's got me. Blandell, most likely. Trailed me—sneakin'—I reckon—shucks!"

The exclamation was drawn from him by the knowledge that his strength had deserted him. He lurched heavily forward, toppled inertly to Red King's neck, then slid headlong into the deep grass at the animal's feet.

For a time there was no movement. Red King stood, looking down inquiringly at his master; then stepped backward and gently nuzzled Shorty's body. He still stood in that position fifteen minutes later, when a horseman rode out of the darkness and cautiously approached.

For another interval there was no movement, and nothing happened. Then the horseman rode closer. From his height he looked down upon the dark blot at Red King's feet; and the dim starlight gleamed upon a heavy pistol in his right hand.

Followed another interval, during which the actors in the singular drama did not move or speak. Then the rider slipped to the ground and bent over Shorty.

"I reckon that settles you!" he said.

A low chuckle smote Red King's ears as the man leaped upon his horse. Red King watched horse and rider until they vanished into the darkness toward Loma. Then he again nuzzled Shorty, as though wondering why he did not get up and continue the journey.

But Shorty did not move. He lay on the grass, queerly doubled; one arm twisted under his head, the other outflung, limp and lax.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

See America First

by Jack Bechdolt



HONEST JOHN BURKE, proprietor of Burke's Summer and Winter Resort - Hotel on Skookum Inlet, leaned in the door of the hotel garage—once a wagon shed—eying the two men before him with a look that assayed their resources down to the last fraction of a cent. He was not displeased with the result.

The pair were obviously loggers and as obviously loggers on a holiday. One could tell that by their dress. Convention, established probably when the first tree was felled, prescribes that an honest-to-goodness logger, when he is all dolled up, shall wear a suit of diagonal black serge cut to give him plenty of room. The coat is double breasted and square; each leg of the trousers has a full yard of material, and is creased along the seams to give the limb the effect of a squared timber as it drapes with a plumb-line directness from the hip to boot-top. Added to this the men wore the logger's hat, round and of black felt, and white boiled shirts, severe collars, and plain, black string ties.

Yes, they were loggers, at leisure, and with money, for they were inquiring the price of the decrepit old Tin Lizzie Honest John had kept in his garage for five years past in the hope of passing it on to somebody so deaf, blind, and innocent he would pay money for it.

"What you boys going to do with a car?" Honest John wanted to know. "Aiming to start a jitney, maybe?"

Wally Newell, who acted as spokesman, shook his head.

"Going to freight stuff in for old man Morris, down to Klahowya Bay?"

"Nope."

"Well, what the Sam Hill—"

"Well, it's this way, Burke," Newell grew confidential. "Me and Bruce Ray has quit old man Morris. We ain't workin' for nobody, now. We're done. Glory be to prohibition, we don't need to work no more for a time. We've *re-tired*."

Burke's glance brightened. "Hello! You don't mean you're bootlegging?"

"Hell, no. We got rich, that's all. We aim to spend it now. Y' see, Burke, it's this way. After the State went dry a couple years back, me and Bruce took a solemn vow we wouldn't go to town again till we had enough to go to some State where they sold something beside this damn hog-wash like Beer-O and ice-cream soda. Before we got right well agreed on where we was goin', and when, the whole dog-gone United States goes to the drys, and there ain't nothin' left for a logger to do but work. We kind of got the habit, and old man Morris got to holding our money for us till it piled up somethin' scandalous. T'other day we find we're rich, and we can't stand the strain no more. We just naturally got to do somethin' with all this money, so we *re-tired*, and decided to buy us an automobile and see the country.

"See America first, that's our motto

We aim to load up the Lizzie with a lot of grub and a couple rifles and some smokin' and eatin' tobacco and a blanket-roll and go out and give the wonders of this here glorious land of the free a look-see and kind of decide whether it needs any more amendin' or not, and if so, as to what respects. Likely we'll sleep out a lot, and likely we'll hunt sometimes, or maybe ketch us a mess of trout sometimes or just laze around camp if we feel so inclined. It's either that or give it all to the bootleggers, and me and Bruce never did care an awful lot for wood alcohol. So John, suppose you unhalter that little gasoline Lizzie and leave us give her a sort of survey."

Honest John did not exhibit any signs of disapproval at these revelations. One who knew him well would have judged him in high good humor as he declared heartily, "Boys, you come to the right party. I got just the car for you. Second hand, maybe, but ain't been run five hundred miles, I'll bet you. Took her in on a bad bill, so the price is bound to be all right. Why, I'd use that car myself if it wasn't I had one already. Come in and look her over."

The motor vehicle in question reposed at the rear of the hotel shed where it had gathered cobwebs and dust for many long months. It was a short, squat, square, pug-nosed, bow-legged, and altogether homely little caricature of an automobile. It had the stream lines of a cracker box mounted on roller skates. Technically it might have been catalogued as pleasure car, but about the only person certain of getting any pleasure from it would be an onlooker with an appreciation of the ridiculous.

Honest John Burke rested one hand lovingly on the tin flank of the aged Lizzie as he expatiated on its merits.

"Almost new, you might say. Top and storm curtains thrown in. Tool-box with complete outfit of tools including spark wrench, bottle of rubber cement and six extra tire nipples. Four first-class tires and an extra tire for emergencies. Electric lights taking their power off the best mag that ever threw a spark. Fine upholstery throughout—look for yourself. And, yes, I'll throw in a complete set of 1917 license plates. What more can you boys want!"

Bruce Ray and Wally Newell gave the aged vehicle their sober, deliberate consideration. Ray, who was four inches better than six feet in height and built in proportion, stooped down and peered solemnly under the chassis until the dust he raised set him sneezing. Newell laid a gingerly hand on the steering wheel, wiggled the spark and gas levers, and finally gazed profoundly at the engine under its tin hood. Each in turn kicked all four of the tires. Then they withdrew a few paces and eyed the machine together.

"Well," Honest John suggested briskly, "she's yours for five hundred, and that's a hundred and fifty less'n a new one would cost you. What say?"

Ray eyed Newell and Newell eyed Ray. Ray muttered, "Is she all right, Wally?" and Newell replied peevishly, "How the blazes should I know?"

Negotiations had reached an obstacle. Neither man trusted Honest John Burke, and neither had any idea what to do about it. Newell was proposing that they return on another day to close the deal when Ray had an inspiration.

"The main and principal consideration with a Tin Lizzie is, can she go?" he declared profoundly. "John, suppose you show us she can go. Otherwise, so far as I'm concerned, she's absolutely O. K."

Newell agreed quickly. "Yes, let's see her paces. That's the big thing after all. If she can go—"

If Honest John had any doubts on this point he covered them well with his fine assumption of scorn.

"Can she go?" he cried. "Why go is that Lizzie's middle name. Yes, sir, not only can she go, but she can come back, too! Why, I'll guarantee she'll carry you boys just as far as you ever want to ride in her." He repeated the guarantee as if he enjoyed it. "Just as far as you want to ride. Why, I'd show you how she goes right now, but, boys, it's dinner time. Suppose we go up to the hotel and take a snack and meantime I'll have my mechanic dust off your car for you and slick her up a little. Then you'll see if she can't go. You'll see!"

Before he followed his guests to the ta-

ble, Honest John summoned Micky, a city-bred youth of seventeen or so, whose pallid face always bore plentiful smudges of oil and grease, and who acted as mechanic to word such cars as stopped at Skookum Inlet. He conferred earnestly with Micky for a full ten minutes and came away reassured by the young man's boastful promises.

"Why, I know that trick ever since I was a kid," Micky had assured him. "I'll guarantee you to get that old bus to run so far off the two of 'em can't walk back to make any kicks. Leave the whole thing to me, and remember a ten-spot's cheap for the overtime I put in."

II.

As the two friends came closer to the summer and winter resort hotel they were aware of music pouring from the open parlor windows, accompanied by the shuffling of feet and a rapid fire of directions uttered in a clear, carrying, ladylike voice. On the veranda they paused to peer in at an animated scene.

At this particular time the constant guests of the hotel consisted of half a dozen married women whose husbands joined them over the week ends. There was only one exception, and he was the young man who appeared to be in charge of the lively proceedings in the hotel parlor.

The phonograph was grinding out a popular jazz record, and the young man was performing some very interesting steps while all the ladies watched with rapt attention. He was a tall and very slim young man, with a pallid skin and a mane of hair sleeked straight back off his nobby forehead. He wore a skin-tight suit of lively brown, a suit that sported a pinched-in back and saucy, open cuffs. He also sported a lively silk shirt and college-boy collar, bright silk socks and white canvas shoes and a futurist cravat.

The young man was saying as he moved, "Now, ladies, make it snappy—like this: step—step—step, pivot, hesitate; step—step—step—*shimmy*. Now, please, let's all try it. Step—step—shake your shoulders! More pep, ladies; more pep, please! Oh, no, no, no, this won't do. Come!" He

clapped his hands sharply and the performance stopped. "Now again," he coaxed sweetly, "and this time let's get some punch in it. Step—step—step—"

Bruce Ray whispered hoarsely into Newell's ear: "My suffering soul, Wally, when I heard his voice I thought he was a lady! Did you ever see the beat of that for a show?"

"I see something like it at the circus in Whatcom one time," Wally admitted, "but it was a show that advertised for men only. What kind of a joint is this dump anyhow? Most of them ladies is old enough to know better."

Ray clutched his friend's arm sharply.

"Look 't the little yellow-haired one," he whispered tensely. "She can do it! Gawd, I never seen any better dancing than that in my life!"

He became quiet, breathing hard as he watched a slender, yellow-haired girl with a pert nose who was dancing with all the advantages of youth and vigor on her side. And as he watched the genteel young master of ceremonies singled out this girl for more attention.

"Now, ladies, watch me and Miss Burke a moment, please. This is how it should go." The couple swayed and shivered through the popular dance, and Bruce Ray stared with all his eyes. Their gyrations brought them close to the window, and as she passed, the yellow-haired girl favored both men with a tantalizing smile.

Ray started as if a bullet had struck him.

"That must be Honest John's girl, Fancy," Wally Newell murmured thoughtfully. "Kind of a flyaway, ain't she?"

"Look here, Wally Newell"—Ray wheeled on his friend—"that ain't no way to talk about a innocent young girl, and you damn well know it. If you can't act like a gent when there's ladies around—"

"My, Godfrey," cried Newell, startled, "I never said nothin'!"

"You said enough," Ray growled menacingly.

Honest John's step on the porch interrupted them, and coincident with that came the ringing of a dinner bell that stopped the dancing. Wally Newell followed his

chum into the dining-room looking very thoughtful.

But Honest John seized his daughter Fancy by the arm and drew her into the hotel office.

Honest John was breathing as if he had been running. He was squat and broad-shouldered and thick-set. His eyes were brown, a peculiar hard brown like the marbles small boys used to call "crock'ys," and the brows above them scowled. His daughter scowled back at him, and her eyes were brown, with the same peculiar glaze as her father's. On closer inspection her prettiness was of a surface sort.

"I told you to cut that out," Honest John murmured, keeping his voice carefully lowered against eavesdropping. "I won't have you messing up with that pink-eyed he dancing teacher, and you know it."

"Is that so?" Fancy Burke inquired with acid sweetness. "Well, Sid Wilcox is the swellest fellow ever stopped in your old joint. If you had more like him—"

"Yah, if I had more like him I'd go broke. I don't want any more like him—and I don't want him round, and I told him so. He's going, and he ain't coming back. You drop him or I'll send you up in the timber to your grandmother, you hear me?"

Fancy shrugged with a fine indifference.

"That's flat," Burke went on. "Last time I'll warn you, too. If you got to have a man, pick a *man*. Pick somebody that talks and acts like a man; somebody that can earn enough money to look after a girl."

"Pick a red-necked logger, I suppose! That's what you'd like to see me tied up to for life. No thanks."

"You could do a whole sight worse than a logger, I'll tell you that, my girl!"

"Oh, could I? Thanks so much for your information."

Fancy moved haughtily toward the dining-room, and her father trundled slowly after her.

During the meal he kept a hard eye on Fancy. But Fancy apparently had heeded his threat to send her to a grandmother's chaperonage back in the big timber, for she, was ignoring Sid Wilcox, the sleek

young dancing teacher, and devoting her smiles and a lively conversation to Bruce Ray, whose mahogany-hued face had turned crimson with pleasure. Wally Newell continued to look thoughtful, and Sid Wilcox openly sulked.

During the afternoon Micky, the dirty-faced boy mechanic, brought a miracle to pass. It deserved to rank almost with the raising of the dead. The bow-legged, pug-nosed little ruin that Honest John called an automobile, rolled out of the garage under its own power for the inspection of the two friends. A suspicious man would have thought it unnecessarily noisy, but neither Wally Newell nor Bruce Ray was suspicious. The thing could go, and that was all they thought about.

They climbed in solemnly and were trundled up and down the road before the hotel with Micky as chauffeur. They pronounced themselves satisfied, and paid to Honest John five hundred hard-earned dollars. Then Honest John generously offered to return their car to his shed, charging only a dollar a day for garage rent until they felt like moving it away.

"I figure we'll hit out of here to-morrow mornin'," Wally announced joyously. "Head for the mountains, eh, old-timer? Trout are bitin' fine these days. And, boy, we got the whole blessed United States for ours to play around in. If this don't beat rustlin' logs for old man Morris, I'm a Chinaman!"

Bruce Ray hesitated.

When he spoke there was something unusual in his manner; something furtive and secretive and guilty.

"Now, Wally," he expostulated, "what's the need of rushing this job? We're going to rest up, ain't we? Well! I say, let us laze along here a few days, in a swell hotel where we can improve ourselves learning how swell people act. Remember we got money, now, Wally, and there ain't no sense herding off by ourselves. A few days won't hurt."

Newell agreed generously.

"S' all right if you want to," he said. "Me, I don't care a hoot. Stay here as long 's you like."

But secretly Newell was worried.

"Acts 's if he was plannin' to get drunk," he thought. "Just like I've seen him fifty times before he'd bust for town and try to bankrupt the saloon business. I wonder now, does he know some bootlegger!"

Several days later, days in which they had lingered at Honest John Burke's, and the snub-nosed car had lingered, untouched in Honest John's garage, Newell amended his opinion. He was sitting under a tree, smoking a vile old pipe and watching two figures, a man and a girl, some distance away on the beach. As he watched them, Wally shook his head sadly. "Poor old Bruce. Poor old bunkie! That girl's got his goat. It's like the poet says, 'the females of the species is more deadly than wood alcohol.'"

III.

THE Seattle boat was landing at Skookum Inlet, and Wally Newell was at the dock to watch the process. Two days before Bruce Ray had left for the city on a mysterious errand. At the same time Sid Wilcox, the lady-like dancing teacher, had taken his departure. Wally was worried about Bruce Ray.

They had spent more than a week at Honest John Burke's, and Bruce altogether ignored their plans to travel and enjoy their newly gained riches. It was becoming painfully evident that Bruce had no desire to travel out of sight of Fancy Burke. He refused even to learn to drive the Tin Lizzie, and without his companionship Wally would not take the bargain machine from Honest John's garage. Altogether it had been a rather trying time for the patient Wally Newell.

Wally was a loyal friend. The last thing he would think of would be deserting Bruce. But it was hard to fret in idleness about a hotel where there were six middle-aged ladies always waiting to trap him into polite conversations and no male companionship save Bruce, whom he seldom saw, and Honest John, whom he secretly disliked heartily.

He thought with a great wistfulness of the alluring motor vacation that had been put aside in order that Bruce Ray could

spend his days playing humble slave to a little yellow-haired, empty-headed girl who, Wally was sure, secretly laughed at his friend.

When finally Bruce left for the city, refusing to tell why, Wally hoped that it was to patronize the bootleggers.

"Better he got drunk a hundred times, than go on like this," he told himself. "A headache and an empty poke's the worst he'd get out of hard likker—and maybe spend a night or two in the hoosegow. Hell, that ain't nothin' to what a woman 'll do to a man!"

But now he saw that Bruce had not been patronizing the bootleggers. His black eyes bulged as he noted what was left of his old buddy.

"Shades of John Barleycorn," he gasped. "It ain't—it can't be! Oh, my gosh, is that him?"

This painful sight, this awful spectacle, this horrific catastrophe in gent's clothing that tottered toward him up the long, sun-bitten dock wearing a weak, self-conscious, deprecating grin—this crippled, imbecilic thing was Bruce Ray, one of the best two-fisted barroom fighters and boomtenders in the wide salt reaches of Puget Sound. Wally did not know whether to laugh or cry; he wanted to do both.

The secret of Bruce's sudden desire to go to the city was a secret no more. Stone walls nor iron bars could not have made a cage to hold it. It cried its shame to the four winds like the calliope at the the tail end of the circus parade.

Bruce Ray had become a lounge lizard, a cabaret hound, a wrist-watch whiffet, a blaah, blaah! The champion log spinner of Whatcom and Snohomish Counties, and the best boomtender in the Pacific Northwest had been spoiled to make positively the worst imitation of a summer-resort nothing-at-all that even the worst summer resort on Puget Sound ever had seen.

Ray was almost four inches better than six feet, and built in good proportion to that height. His hair was a tow hue with tow-hued eyebrows and an ornate tow mustache that drooped flaxen plumes from his lip. His complexion was a vivid mahogany and his eyes blue. He now betrayed his

mental condition by garbing his great girth and height in a something less than a child's portion of cinnamon red shoddy of a pattern not more than forty-five minutes from Broadway and Forty-Second Street. The coat was pinch-backed, and its tight little arms swelled like the skins of over-stuffed bologna sausage as Ray's muscles flexed beneath. But each arm terminated in perfectly cunning flaring cuffs sporting three buttons each.

Trousers were a painful subject of which the least said the better. Their economy of construction made of the finely proportioned limbs of the big logger something almost indecent. Nor was this all. Ray had a silk shirt—a shirt of pink and green alternating stripes, and a college-boy collar with long, drooping points, from which bulged a chaste bright blue cravat. And he wore a new, white Panama type hat encircled by a wide band of Roman stripe, and white canvas shoes on his large and sinewy feet.

Needless to say he had lost all that free, splendid carriage of a real man, and add to that that Wally Newell's open-mouthed astonishment was not reassuring and you can guess the embarrassment with which he advanced to meet his friend.

Bruce Ray essayed an easy wave of the hand and blushed redder as he mumbled a greeting to his friend.

Wally Newell did not respond. He merely stared grimly. Though Newell did not come quite to the big fellow's shoulder, and was trained thin as a pike pole besides, his dominance over Bruce Ray was seldom questioned. For instance, on this occasion Ray began to shift uneasily from one foot to the other. He essayed to laugh off his embarrassment, but the laugh was only a weak giggle. His face sobered quickly, and he asked with a show of anger, "Why don't you talk English? I ain't no deaf mute."

Still Newell said nothing.

Ray coughed nervously, and revolved slowly on one foot, displaying the atrocities in detail. With a complete view of the pinched-in back with its narrowed shoulders straining their seams, and the snappy coat skirt fluttering like a ballet-dancer's

ruffles, the stern critic gasped, but held his tongue.

Ray said humbly, "Don't you like it, Wally?"

Newell answered, "Come with me. There ain't nobody about the front porch—*luckily*." He led the way.

"What the crimson brimstone blazes d'you mean by that?" Ray laid a huge paw on his friend's shoulder, halting him in his tracks. But Newell was not to be bluffed out of his firmness. "I mean I got a spare pair of pants you can cover up your shame with, and I guess Old Man Burke won't give a darn if you eat your meals in your shirt-sleeves for a couple days, till you can get you a coat from town."

"Coat! I got a coat."

"You got a what?"

"You heard me."

"Look here, Bruce Ray, you mean to tell me you're goin' to wear that fancy-dress-ball get-up regular—at your age?"

"What's wrong with it—and my age?"

"What's wrong? Suffering torment, what's wrong? What's— Here, you come with me, up to my room. We got to have some words, that's all. Let's have 'em where the whole hotel can't hear us."

Newell led his friend to comparative seclusion. In his room, with the door locked, he ordered sternly: "Now, lay off that damn—launjeree—as much as you decently can. My stomach ain't right skookum this morning anyhow. Then you can tell me how it happened."

Ray divested himself of the cinnamon-hued coat with a gingerly care lest he split it. He ripped off the linen collar and the new, tight shoes, and loosened his waist-band.

"She does kind of bind," he admitted with a sigh. "But that's the newest thing, Wally—the *darn-near cry*, as the fellow says in French. And me, well, I don't see who's goin' to stop me if I want to spend my own money trying to look like something, instead—"

"Yes, you look like—*something*," Newell cut in with a nasty emphasis.

"How's that—*something*?"

"In them clothes you look like a cheap

imitation of that little rat-nosed, dough-faced, pink-eyed Pekinese pup, Sid Wilcox. That's what you look like."

"Suppose I do?"

"My Godfrey, you don't tell me you want to look like that—that— Here, you c'mere. You been drenching yourself up so's you *smell* like him, too."

"Aw, Wally, I have not."

"You have. I can smell it on you. Perfume!"

"That's just a hair-cut I got."

"Don't smell like hair-cut to me. No, sir."

"Aw, well, you know so much!"

Wally suddenly turned his back on his huge and perspiring friend. He gazed from the window without seeing. That whiff of perfume was the last straw. By that he knew the affair was serious. Now, he realized how hard hit Bruce was by the charms of Fancy Burke. Fancy Burke, that light-minded, shallow, yellow-haired doll who tinkled with cheap jewelry and talked only of dances, men, and movie actors; Fancy Burke, so suitably matched with Sid Wilcox, the soprano-voiced dancing expert; Fancy Burke, and not one of the whole Burke tribe fit to lace the heavy woods boot of his chum!

Gone glimmering were their plans, now. Gone the prospect of that happy, casual, easy-going vacation in which they would take apart their native land piece by piece and make it over to suit their fancy. Let the little car rust in its garage; what of it now?

Yesterday he had thought all this a joke—one of Bruce's typical, mad whims; to-day it threatened tragedy. Fancy Burke had carved her initials deep in that toughly tanned and weather-beaten but honest, loyal, and tender organ that was Bruce Ray's heart.

When Newell spoke again his manner was mild, almost pleading. "Bruce, you—you wasn't thinkin' of wearin' clothes like that *regular*?"

Ray answered with an anxiety almost pitiful. "Why, ain't they all right, Wally? All joshing aside, ain't they good, snappy clothes—or do I just look like an old he-fool that's gone and got to thinking he's

young because it's spring-time? I—I kind of hoped—well, thunderation, I don't want to look and act like a hick all my life. I—was going to the party Saturday night."

"To the dance!"

"Uhuh."

"With a lady?"

"Uhuh."

"O-o-o-h, I see." Newell nodded slowly. He added: "Why, you can't dance, you old bull-moose!"

"She—Miss Burke, she promised to teach me, Wally. That's why I got me them clothes. Of course, if I look like a fool—"

Newell was touched. He took pity on his friend. He lied nobly. "Well, old-timer, I guess you won't look any more like a damn fool than most of the damn fools that go to those damn fool shimmy dancin' parties. But it ain't just the way I been used to seein' you."

Ray was visibly cheered. His face brightened. "I—I got another suit in my turkey," he said, reaching for his suit-case. "Mebbe you'd like to see that one, too. A kind of blue outfit."

But Newell waved him to silence. "No," he decided promptly, "not right now, Bruce! I—got sort of a headache, I guess. Don't feel right strong just now. You run along and doll yourself up for dinner."

IV.

WHEN his friend was gone, Wally Newell walked slowly from the hotel, back into the second-growth timber, deep into the heart of it, where there was quiet. Naturalists tell us that the whale, mortally stricken, always heads for dry land. Some dim memory of a day when a whale was something else that lived on a beach and claimed land as home seems to draw him toward the beach to die. Wally Newell followed an instinct as deep rooted when he carried his troubles into the solemn sanctuary of the big timber.

Some hours later he returned to the hotel, sought out Bruce, and led him away. Naturally they went back into the timber.

On the way they said nothing. They flung themselves on the moss, and Newell

lighted his pipe. Ray, sighing noisily, rolled a brown-paper cigarette.

Newell did not know quite how to begin. What he had to say was very important, more important than any words he had ever exchanged with his friend. And it was of such a nature that the wrong words would mar its meaning.

He continued to puff at his pipe long after it was cold. Finally he brought from his pocket a bulging roll of bills and carefully separated two hundred and fifty dollars which he handed to his chum.

Ray said gruffly, "What's this?"

"For your share of the Tin Lizzie."

"Buying me out?"

"Uhuh."

"Say, looky here, Wally, you ain't sore?"

"Me sore? Hell!"

"You're dead certain?"

"You bet I am, old-timer. Why, Bruce, she's a mighty fine little girl, that Fancy Burke, and I'd rather you got her than all the Tin Lizzies in the world. Only thing 't would make me sore now 'd be seein' you lose your nerve. You go in and grab that girl. Gettin' married 's the best thing can happen to a man like you, Bruce, if he gets a good woman."

There was a frightened look in Ray's blue eyes. "My gosh, Wally, you don't suppose she'd—"

"Why, of course she would!" Newell was scornfully positive. "She'd jump at the chance. Why, you'd ought to consider the thing as sure as done, a fellow like you! Would she? Huh!"

After some hesitation Ray asked: "Wally, did you figure on lighting out right off?"

"No need my sticking around here. Can't do any good." Newell sucked hard at his dead pipe.

"You give me a powerful lot of encouragement, Wally."

"You don't need encouragement. You got a cinch."

"But I kind of wish you'd stick round and tell me so every now 'n' then. If you ain't in a sweat to be off—"

"Why, sure, I will! Just as long as I'm any use to you," Wally Newell declared briskly.

Ray answered him with a grateful look. That was all they said about it, and it settled the matter. It settled several important questions between them in a manner worthy their friendship. Both knew they had come to a parting, and each was glad they could part like this—good friends.

Wally Newell followed his chum back toward the hotel with a strange, heavy reluctance, as if he were turning back from his newly made grave. With the surprise of a discovery he decided he was getting old. The sparkle was gone from the sunlight, and the tang from the salt air. It was the first day he could remember out of thirty-five years when the thought of age had occurred to him. He was conscious of walking more slowly, soberly, as if he carried a burden all these years and suddenly realized it.

V.

THE dance was on a Saturday night, and two days intervened—days which Wally Newell spent in the background of affairs, watching his friend's earnest courtship of Fancy Burke. Wally kept himself always in easy call, and he advised earnestly with Bruce Ray as to whether a red or yellow cravat was more snappy for gent's evening wear; whether it was better to carry the handkerchief in one's coat cuff, as Sid Wilcox did, or let a corner of it protrude from the breast pocket in the manner of more conservative up-to-date dressers. He even went so far as to help Bruce practise dance steps, and the two of them, their shoes removed, could have been seen at late hours in Bruce's room, locked in affectionate embrace, teetering and shuffling with sober, anxious faces, back and forward, sweating copiously, laboring heroically to master the intricacies of the shimmy.

The courtship seemed to progress surprisingly well. Fancy Burke showed a notable preference for the big logger that kept Bruce in a state of bewildered excitement. Honest John gave signs of approval, and even went so far as to compliment his daughter on finally exhibiting a few ounces of common, hog sense in her selection of a man.

Even Wally was happy in his friend's

success. Sometimes he went out to the wagon-shed and sat solemnly in the motionless Tin Lizzie, now his own, and told himself how happy he was. But down in his heart he mourned for Bruce Ray as for one gone beyond the grave.

Thus, on the night of the dance he left his place among the wall-flowers early and stole out under the stars. Habit took him to the wagon-shed, where he sat smoking and thinking sober thoughts.

Two figures stopped before the open door of the shed and began to talk. One of them was Sid Wilcox. There was no mistaking that ladylike voice with its slight lisp.

Wally Newell listened with a lively interest.

He was astonished to learn that the dancing teacher was back.

Honest John had plainly intimated to him that Sid Wilcox had gone, and would never return so long as he was proprietor of Burke's Summer and Winter Resort Hotel. Honest John had further said that Sid was a lily-fingered, sore-eyed little white rat, who rightfully ought to be standing in a store telling ladies the hosiery counter was three aisles to the right and straight ahead, only he hadn't guts enough to come that close to holding down a man's job—and Wally had agreed with him.

Now Sid was back at Skookum Inlet, so Wally listened curiously.

Sid's companion was Micky, the dirty-faced boy mechanic of Honest John's garage.

"Now, Micky," Sid Wilcox was saying, "you're sure there isn't another car beside Burke's? I don't want anybody following us and making trouble."

"Nobody's going to get you if you take the boss's car and me driving it," Micky assured him. "Kid, I'm some driver when I cut her loose, I'll tell the world. But it's worth half a century t' me."

"You'll get it."

"Yeah. Now I'll get it. Come through with the jack, Sid."

"I think you're very suspicious," Sid protested feebly as something passed between them. "Now, are you satisfied?"

"Another thing, Sid. Y' want to look

out for that red-necked logger, Bruce Ray. He's stuck on Fancy. If he gets wise to you he'll raise hell."

"Huh! Don't you worry about that. Nor Honest John Burke either. Just so long as he hasn't anything to follow us in, I'll get that girl away from here, and before they find us we'll be married."

"Some bride and groom, Bo; some bride and groom!" Micky chuckled, and they passed on.

Wally Newell sat bolt upright, blinking into the dark. So Sid Wilcox planned to kidnap Fancy! He was first conscious of a feeling of great relief. He hoped Sid Wilcox would succeed.

It also occurred to him that Sid could carry out his plan without trouble if only he remained silent about what he had overheard. And Fancy Burke was Wally's first, second and third choice for the dancing man's wife. What Fancy might think about it, he did not much care.

The notion was a tempting solution to his worries and threatening unhappiness. For some little time he entertained it. Until he thought of Bruce Ray.

What sort of way was this for him to be acting toward Bruce! Going back on a friend, him, Wally Newell! Bruce wanted Fancy for himself—had as good as got her—and here he was sittin' out there in a shed doin' nothin' while that soprano-voiced, sweet-scented little skunk was plannin' to steal Fancy away!

In the dark Wally blushed hotly with shame for himself.

He followed the blush by leaping out of the Tin Lizzie and making a bee-line for the parlor where the dance was being held.

VI.

HONEST JOHN BURKE thought fast for a fat man. He went into action before Wally had sketched the bare outline of his news. He streaked down the hall of his hotel, past the parlor where the dance was at its height, head down, bowling guests from his path. Wally followed close in his wake. Bruce Ray, peering idly from the parlor door, looking for Fancy Burke, who had slipped from the room, saw them and

was drawn after by some sixth sense that whispered there was likely going to be a fight somewhere. The three of them reached the door of the hotel's garage simultaneously.

The garage was empty.

Honest John, who was a man of few words, spoke his few with skilful choice and rare feeling.

"Gone!" he wound up, shaking his fist at the inoffensive heavens. "And taken my car, the only blink-blanked and doubly hoodedooed car in the whole blistering, brainless, and doubly sin-steeped place. My girl and my car, gone! And with that thing!"

Bruce Ray plucked eagerly at Wally's sleeve. "Somebody beat him out of a board bill?" he asked hopefully.

"Somebody beat him out of his daughter and his car and run off with your girl," Wally answered. It was no time to break the news gently. "Fancy Burke's been kidnaped by Sid Wilcox."

Ray's jaw set hard. "There's the Tin Lizzie," he said quietly. "Burke, you drive that. We'll go along."

Honest John stared hard. "You're crazy," he said. "The Tin Lizzie? Why, that thing can't—" He remembered something then and said no more.

The two friends did not heed his words. They had him by either arm and were rushing him into the shed. "We'll save her!" Wally was shouting to Bruce, and Ray answered grimly: "We got to!"

Honest John knew this was no time to explain. But his mind was a tempest-tossed sea of conflicting thoughts and emotions as he bent to crank a spark of life into the ancient rattle-trap he had sold the loggers.

The little tin car answered his caress with the roar of a rudely wakened lion and a kick that left Honest John caressing his numbed wrist, gazing slack mouthed at the miracle. Only the two friends saw nothing extraordinary about it. They hustled him to the driver's perch.

"They'll make for Sauk, sure's poison," Wally Newell yelled in his ear. "Old Dogfish Jenkins is a J. P., and they'll get him to tie the knot."

Honest John knew this. Sauk was the

only possible destination for the kidnaper. He swung the ancient car into a rutted road in which the old logs of a corduroy trail still lay buried under the muck. A fine drizzle was falling, and the way was treacherously slippery. At frequent but unexpected intervals the wheels hit the buried logs of the former skid road, sending the light vehicle in erratic bounds toward heaven. A good half of the speed they made was in the perpendicular, and at every leap the heart of Honest John Burke stopped beating.

Yet the Tin Lizzie kept on going.

Through the dark and over that terrible road it kept on its way, and none of them could see a yard ahead.

For half an hour or longer they must have held on when Honest John's palpitating heart did a double palpitation. In mid-career their tin steed's pulse ceased to beat for long seconds. Then the Tin Lizzie sneezed, a terrific, explosive sneeze. The faithful engine tried again to resume its normal, uproarious manner of life, but faltered weakly. Sneezes came in regular succession now, and their pace slowed to a crawl.

And just then came a loud shout from the two in the back seat. Ahead of them, glimmering dimly through the mist, showed the tail-light of an automobile.

Even as they saw it the Tin Lizzie stopped completely. She had broken her noble heart in their service. Now that the goal was in sight she laid down to eternal rest. The cracked cylinders Micky had so skilfully stopped with putty flooded, and the semblance of an engine, heated beyond endurance, began to disintegrate to the dust where it belonged.

In the excitement of that moment Honest John Burke addressed the faithful little car with words which were illuminating to his two passengers. They gathered a wisdom about the Tin Lizzie which they lacked when they bought her. But more pressing business was at hand just now.

It was no time to survey the wreck and consider vengeance on Honest John. The tail lights of the car ahead remained stationary. With a shout they started afoot, leaving the inn-keeper puffing far behind.

Luck had run against Micky, the dirty-faced, demon driver. He had to stop to change a tire. Fancy Burke knelt beside him in the mud, working with a rim wrench while Micky jacked the wheel. Only the bridegroom was idle. He teetered anxiously, his hands clasped, uttering timid, plaintive little cries that got no attention from the busy workers.

It was Fancy, her face plentifully smeared with mud, who discovered Bruce Ray and Wally Newell lurching down the road, splashed waist high in mud and charging like the Light Brigade. She welcomed their impetuous onset with a calm, collected smile and a cheerful, "Look what's here!" But Sid Wilcox, after one wide-eyed glance, fled yelping into the curtained shelter of Honest John's big touring car.

VII.

NORMALLY Honest John was not quick on his feet, and he had passed a terrible half-hour. He soon ceased to run toward the stalled machine ahead and began to limp. Once he fell headlong into a puddle and continued to wallow there in a way that would persuade an innocent bystander he liked it. Finally he found his footing and kept on.

He was in shouting distance of the run-aways when his goal, the tail light of his own car, began to move from him. He bellowed frantically after it and tried again to run. In a moment the big car was gone.

But Honest John was not left alone. Bruce Ray and Wally Newell materialized from the darkness beside him. They were ominously calm.

"S all right," Wally explained when the fond father's profanity had run down, "we give 'em your blessing."

"Yes," Bruce Ray echoed quietly, "it's all right. They both want to get married—to each other."

"Want to get married! Want to get married! What's *want* to get to do with it? You mean to say you two gibbering imbeciles stood around and let my girl run off with that—that perfumed, performing poodle, and—"

Ray interrupted, quietly and sternly:

"We mean to say your girl's about old enough to know her own mind. She says she wants to marry Sid Wilcox, and that's the end of it, far's we're concerned."

"That's it," Newell seconded cheerfully. "I don't pretend to account for her taste in a man, but that's what she wants, and me and Bruce are willin'."

"You let him steal my car—my car that's worth five thousand dollars if it's worth a cent! You let him run off with that."

"Oh, he'll run back again," Newell promised easily. "He'll have to run back to his pa-in-law as soon 's the gasoline gives out. Come to think of it, I dunno but you got just the kind of son you deserve. And speakin' of cars, Burke—"

"Yes, speaking of cars," Ray echoed eagerly.

They brushed against Burke in the dark. On either side he felt the press of their big shoulders. There was something menacing about their nearness.

Burke spoke like a stricken man when he murmured dully, "What about cars?"

The lights were still bright in Honest John Burke's Summer and Winter Resort Hotel when the two friends, on foot, neared it. The dance was still in progress in the parlor.

"We'll get out our turkeys and just kind of fade away," Bruce Ray suggested. "I got my new suit a little muddy, and I guess I don't want to see nobody right now."

Newell assented cheerfully. "We'll go down to the dock and wait for the Seattle boat," he said. Then he added with a thoughtfulness eloquent of his sorrow for his heart-stricken friend: "And, say, Bruce, you know they're still selling man's drinks up in Canada. We could go up to Vancouver if you got a hankering after revivin' old days and drownin' out sorrows!"

"Nope, Wally," answered Ray. "Somehow I don't feel like I'd have felt about this if it was ten years back. Say, we got our five hundred off'n Honest John again. My notion is we buy us a new Tin Lizzie that 'll go, and start off again on that trip. Me, I don't feel like neither booze nor matrimony. I'll see America first."

The Whisperer

by Max Brand

Author of "Clung," "The Frigate Bird," "The Untamed," etc.

CHAPTER I.

PATRICIA FINDS WORK.

UNQUESTIONABLY the average man considers that woman's God-given vocation is the rearing of children. One may even go so far as to say that the average woman concurs in this judgment.

Which prepares the stage for the entrance of Patricia Lauriston, who was not average. Though she admitted that fate and the ways of the world condemned the majority of her sex to marriage, this admission only made her stamp along in shoes a little broader of toe and a little lower of heel. Not that she wished to be man-nish. She was not. All she desired escape from was that femininity which bounds its world with children on the one side and a husband on the other.

Neither should it be understood that Patricia disliked men. On the contrary, she frankly preferred them to her own sex. Her whole struggle, in fact, was to be accepted by men as a friend, and it cut her to the heart to watch the antics of fellows who had courage enough to woo her. She noted that men among men were frank, open of hand and heart and eye, generous, brave, good-humored; she noted that the same men among women became simpering, smirking fantastic fools. A man among men tried to be himself; a man among women dreaded nothing so much as the exposure of his own innate simplicity and manhood. All this Patricia had discovered by long and patient experiment.

There was the case of Steven Worth, for instance. Steve was the best friend of her brother, Hal Lauriston, and Steve was

almost another member of the family. Until, on a day, Patricia came home from school in long skirts. Instead of picking her up by the elbows and throwing her ceilingwards, as had been his custom in the past, Steve shook hands, blushed, and suggested a walk in the garden. Patricia was only sixteen at the time, but she knew what was coming; a girl of sixteen is at least equal to a man of twenty-six, plus certain instinctive knowledge which has never left the blood of woman since that sunshiny day in the garden when Eve ate the apple and whispered with the serpent.

Therefore Patricia knew, I say, exactly what was coming, but she allowed the disease to develop and take hold on Steven Worth. She let him hold her hand; she let him look into her eyes and smile in a peculiarly asinine manner interspersed with occasional glances toward the stars. Three days and nights of this, and then Steve fell on his knees and asked her to be his wife. It didn't thrill Patricia. It merely disgusted her and made her feel very lonely. She told Steve just how she felt and went back into the house.

The next morning Hal Lauriston came to her room and swore that she had broken the heart of his dearest friend and that she was a devilish little cat; the next noon Steven Worth, she learned, had purchased a ticket for South America. Patricia went to Steve and told him—well, she told him many things, and in the end Steve Worth declared that she was the "bulliest little scout in the world" and that he was "no end of an ass." Patricia concurred silently in the last remark. The end of it was that Steve did not go to South America to die of swamp fever; but both he and

Patricia knew that they could never be friends again.

The point of all this is that Patricia did not, certainly, miss Steve as a husband, but she regretted him mightily as a friend. She went abroad among the world of men, thereafter, and tried to make other friends to take the place of Steve, but she discovered that after friendship had progressed to a certain point the finest of men began to grow silent and thoughtful and a certain hungry look came in their eyes. The bitter truth came home to Patricia that she was too beautiful to have a single friend; many a time she bowed her head before her mirror and wept because her eyes were of a certain blackness and her hair of a certain dark and silken length. This sounds like fiction, but to Patricia it was a grim and heart-breaking truth.

Now, an average woman of this temperament, at a certain point in her life, would have taken up woman suffrage or prohibition—or Greek. Patricia, however, was not average. She refused to believe that all men are weak-kneed sentimentalists; she looked abroad, like Alexander, to a new world, and new battles.

It followed, quite naturally, that Patricia should go West. For she had heard sundry tales of a breed of men who inhabit the mountain-desert, men stronger than adversity and hard of heart and of heart, men too bitterly trained in the battle of existence to pay any heed to the silken side of life. She hoped to find among them at least some few who would look first for a human being, and afterward for a sex.

This would have been enough to send Patricia to the mountain-desert. There was another reason sufficiently unfeminine to interest her. One year before, a second cousin who bore her family name, Mortimer Lauriston, had been shot in the town of Eagles in the mountain-desert by a man named Vincent St. Gore. St. Gore had been tried, but the jury had always disagreed. Patricia Lauriston decided that it would be her work to tear the blindfold from the eyes of justice and bring an overdue fate upon this Vincent St. Gore. She could live not exactly in the town of Eagles, but at the

ranch formerly owned by Mortimer Lauriston, and now operated by another cousin, Joseph Gregory. Having made up her mind, Patricia packed her trunk, kissed her mother good-by, and from the train sent back post-cards of farewell to her more intimate friends.

Which brings us to Eagles, a white-hot day in May, the hills spotted with mesquite, and below the hills the illimitable plains, the stopping of the stage with its six dripping horses, and the entrance of Patricia into the mountain-desert.

She was not disappointed. She liked everything she saw—the fierce heat of the day—the unshaven men—the buckboard of Joseph Gregory waiting to meet her. Even Joseph himself was not displeasing to her, though in a population where none were overly attractive Joseph was commonly called "Ugly Joe." His forehead was so low and slanting that his dirty-white sombrero had to be pulled literally over his eyebrows—otherwise it would have blown off. His eyes were small and a very pale blue. His nose was both diminutive and sprawling, as if it had been battered out of shape in fistic battles. Below the nose his face ceased and his mustache began. It was the pride of Ugly Joe. The stiff hairs descended like a host of simitar-shaped bristles far past his lower lip and at either side the mustache jagged down in points which swept far below his chin. He was like a man in a perpetual mask. If he had shaved not even his wife would have known him. Patricia, however, was undismayed. She advanced with her suitcase and claimed relationship.

Ugly Joe parted his mustache, spat over the forward wheel of the buckboard, considered her a silent moment, and then touched the brim of his sombrero by way of salutation.

"Evening," said Ugly Joe, "throw up your grip and climb in."

"But I have a trunk," said Patricia. "Isn't there room for that behind?"

"Sure! Is that your trunk?"

And he pointed to a wardrobe-trunk which was being rolled onto the "hotel" veranda. She nodded and offered to get help for the handling of the trunk, for she

remembered how two expressmen had sweated and grunted over that trunk, but Cousin Joe shook his head and climbed down from the buckboard. He was a short man, bent from riding horseback, and he walked with the shuffling hobble of the old cattleman, putting his weight on his toes. He was short, but exceedingly broad, and when a couple of men had helped him to shoulder the trunk he came back, hobbling along with it and showing no apparent discomfort. He dumped it in the back of the buckboard, which heaved and groaned under the burden.

"Might I ask," said Ugly Joe, as they climbed up to the front seat, "if there are all clothes you got in that trunk?"

"Mostly," answered Patricia.

"H-m!" remarked Cousin Joe, and started his ponies over the homeward path.

For half an hour they jolted along in silence over what might have been a road.

"Maybe," said Ugly Joe at length, "you figure on starting a store with that many clothes?"

Now Patricia had prided herself on traveling light into the wilderness. There were only a few negligees, some house-dresses, morning-gowns, and several riding and walking outfits, as well as one or two tailored suits. She had not brought a single evening dress! Accordingly she stared at Ugly Joe in some surprise, but before she could reply he went on:

"You're considerable well fixed for clothes and a name, eh? What's your name again?"

"Patricia," she answered.

"Patricia? And what do folks call you for short?"

"Nothing else. Personally, I don't believe in nicknames."

"D'you mean to say," said Ugly Joe, much moved, "that when your ma or your pa speaks to you they always take that much tongue-trouble and spend that much air? Patricia!"

He did not repeat it scoffingly, but rather with much wonder. Patricia decided that being in Rome she must adapt herself to the customs of the country.

"I suppose," she said, "that it could be shortened."

"Between you and me," confided Ugly Joe, "it 'll have to be shortened. Long names ain't popular much around here. Look at them hosses. S'pose I give them fancy names, how'd I ever handle 'em? S'pose I wanted 'em to stop and I had to say: 'Whoa, Elizabeth Virginia II and Johnny Payne III.' Nope, you can see for yourself that wouldn't do. A long name is as much in the way as a long barrel on a shotgun when you want to shoot quick."

"What do you call your horses?" asked Patricia.

"The nigh one is Spit and the off one is Fire. I just say: 'Giddap, Spit-fire! and we're off. See?'"

"Oh," smiled Patricia, "and what will you call me?"

"I'll leave off the fancy part. Pat is a good enough name. What say?"

"That," said Patricia, "will be fine."

"Sure. I'll call you Pat and you call me Joe. Simple; easy to remember; saves lots of wind and talking. Talking ain't popular none with me."

And he proved it by maintaining a resolute silence for the next fifteen minutes. As for Patricia, she was too busy sweeping the plains with a critical eye to wish for talk. Moreover, the silence was pleasing. That was a way men had with each other. She began to feel, also, that she had at last reached a country where a pretty face was not a passport to all hearts; she would have to prove herself before she would be accepted.

CHAPTER II.

THE KILLING OF LAURISTON.

NOT that this was in the least discouraging to Patricia. She was, indeed, rather excited and stimulated by the prospect, as an athlete feels himself keyed to the highest point of efficiency by a contest with a rival of unquestioned prowess. She swept the country with a critical eye; she glimpsed the massive, bended shoulders of Ugly Joe with a side glance; the mesquite-dotted hills, the white-hot plains, the man who lived in them—all were good in the eye of Patricia. She would have ac-

cepted the silence of her companion and persisted in it, but she came to this place for a purpose and talk was necessary before she could accomplish it.

"I suppose," said Patricia, "that every one wonders why I've come out here?"

Ugly Joe had caught the reins between his knees while he rolled a cigarette. Now he finished licking the paper smooth and bent a meditative eye upon Patricia while he lighted his cigarette and inhaled the first puff.

"Don't know that I've heard any remarks," he responded at length. "Giddap, Spit-fire!"

They jolted over a particularly uneven stretch of the trail. When Patricia had caught her breath again she said: "Nevertheless, I'll tell you, Cousin Joe. I've come out here to run down the murderer of Mortimer Lauriston!"

She waited for this verbal bull's-eye to take effect, but Ugly Joe seemed not a whit interested.

"That ain't hard," he answered. "You can pick him up mostly any day in Eagles."

"I," said Patricia, "am going to have him tried—and hung."

"H-m!" grunted Ugly Joe. "Where you going to get a jury to convict him?"

"Is it hard to do that?"

"I'll say it's hard!"

"Does he bribe the jurors?"

"Nope, not exactly."

"Is this murderer too popular to be convicted?"

"Him?" Ugly Joe grinned for the first time. "Nope, it'd be a hard job to find a feller less popular than this Goggles."

"Goggles? I thought his name is Vincent St. Gore?"

"Maybe it is, but who could remember a word as long as that? We call him Goggles because of the funny glasses he wears—big ones with black rims. Makes him look like a frog. Goggles popular? Not around here, Pat. Nope, he's just a plain, damned dude, that's what he is. Out here for a couple of years for his health. Little, skinny feller who goes around in fancy, shined-up riding-boots and trousers baggy above the knees. Lives over to Widow Morgan's house, where he got a piano

moved in and he just sits around and tickles the keys, or mosies out and rides a fine, foreign, high-steppin' hoss around. Never talks much to anybody. He forgets everybody as quick as he's introduced to 'em. Popular? Hell, no! Excuse me."

The description was a distant shock to Patricia. She had pictured, quite naturally, a tall, gaunt, swarthy rider of the mountain-desert, black-browed, black-eyed, fierce, silent. Instead, here was a man who fitted his name—Vincent St. Gore—possibly some disinherited second son, the black sheep of some honorable family.

"But if he doesn't bribe the jurors, and if he isn't popular," she queried, "how in the world does he manage to escape scot-free? Is it because Mortimer Lauriston was disliked—because the people of Eagles were glad to get rid of him?"

"Nope, everybody liked old Mort. He never did no harm, except when he was full of red-eye."

"Then," said Patricia desperately, "was it because St. Gore—your man Goggles—killed Mortimer in self-defense?"

"Pat," said Ugly Joe, grinning again, "the more I hear you talk the more I see that you sure are the cousin of my wife Martha. She does just the same way. Get her talking about anything and she hangs on like a bulldog till she's got out of me all I know. I can see you're the same way and I'll be savin' myself if I tell you the whole yarn right here and now."

"Good," said Patricia, unabashed.

"It was in Langley's saloon," said Ugly Joe. "'S a matter of fact most of these hell-raisin's begin with red-eye and end with guns. Well, it was along about the middle of the afternoon. I was in there, so was about twenty more. And there was Goggles standin' at one end of the bar sipping whisky mixed up with seltzer-water out of a high glass. He never would drink whisky straight like a regular honest man. There he stood, staring straight in front of him that way he has and never seeming to see nothing that happened near him.

"About that time in come Mort Lauriston. He was lit to the eyes, was old Mort, and when he got drunk he was some noisy. Which everybody knew he didn't mean

nothing and they let him go along pounding 'em on the back. He ordered up drinks for the crowd and everybody accepted but Goggles. Nobody ever included him in anything. He was just part of the landscape like one of them hills over there. He was there, but he didn't mean nothing; but Mort seen him and he got mad. He goes up and says: 'Partner, whisky wasn't never meant to be spoiled by mixing with water.'

"Then he grabs Goggles's high glass and spills the mixture out on the floor.

"Hey, Pete,' he says to the bartender, 'give this feller Goggles a man-sized drink of man-sized booze.'

"Everybody laughed. They was all tickled at the thought of Goggles drinking straight red-eye. Pete put up a whisky-glass filled to the brim.

"Goggles was standing there pretty quiet. He just fixed the glasses different on his nose and stands there staring at Mort. The whisky has splashed pretty liberal across them fine riding-boots of his, but he didn't make an ugly move.

"He says: 'Mr. Lauriston, I'm sure that you have carried your little game far enough. You certainly don't intend to make me drink that glass of vile bar-whisky.'

"Don't I?' says Mort, and the rest of us laughed. 'Bud, you're going to drink every drop of it!'

"Goggles takes off his glasses and wipes them careful on his handkerchief, puts them back, and studies Mort like a rock-hound looking at a new kind of ore.

"He says in that soft, low voice of his: 'You are apparently very drunk, Mr. Lauriston. What if I refuse to drink this liquor?'

"Out comes Mort with two big gats. He shoves them under the nose of Goggles.

"Drink, you damned foreign English dude!' he says.

"Sir,' says Goggles, 'I'm going to drink this under compulsion, not because I fear you, but because I don't want to harm a drunken man. But the next time we meet, Mr. Lauriston, I'm going to kill you.'

"With that he picks up the glass of booze careful, without spilling a drop, and says: 'Here is to our early meeting, sir.' And

he drinks the glass down without batting an eye, bows to Mort, and walks out of the saloon.

"Well, I'll be damned,' says Mort 'What d'you think of that?'

"Herb Fisher speaks up and says: 'I dunno how you figure it, Mort, but if I was you I'd keep my guns ready for a fast draw the next time I seen Goggles. He don't look none too dangerous, but looks is deceiving.'

"Mort, he took that to heart. He left town pretty hurried: and it was about ten days before he come back. At least, he started back, and afterward they found his body on the road near Eagles. He'd been shot fair and square between the eyes and his guns was lying near him with a bullet fired out of each of them, showing that he'd had a chance to fight for his life. He wasn't shot down from no ambush.

"Of course they arrested Goggles. The sheriff took half a dozen deputies along to help out in case of a muss, but Goggles didn't turn a hair. He walked right into the jail, give a big bond, and never made a move to get away before the trial.

"At the trial he didn't have a chance, it looked like. Everybody knew that Mort was a harmless, noisy sort of gent. Maybe he done wrong in making Goggles drink, but there wasn't no call for any gun-play. That was what the district attorney kept pumping into the jury all through the trial and they were all set to hang Goggles. Everybody knew that. But when the last day of the trial came along, right when the district attorney was making his last big spiel, a little piece of paper comes fluttering like a white bird through the window right behind Goggles, and over his shoulder, and into the lap of one of the gents in the jury-box.

CHAPTER III.

THE PASSING OF KENNEDY.

"HE unfolded it sort of absent-minded and read what was on it, and then he stood up slow, like he was being pulled up by the hair of the head. And he says: 'God!' just once, soft and easy,

but it cut off the speech of the district attorney like a hot knife going through a piece of cheese.

"'What's there?' said the district attorney.

"But the gent that got the paper, he just passed it on to the gent next to him, and that one turned sort of green and sick-looking and moved it on to the next. And so it went all through the jury-box.

"The district attorney finished up; the jury went out and came back in five minutes, saying: 'Not guilty!' Yep, it was a unanimous verdict, and afterward every one on that jury went around telling the boys in a loud voice that he had voted to acquit Goggles, and that he'd like to have the word passed on."

"It was the paper?" asked Patricia.

"It sure was. There was writ on it: 'Boys, I've got all your names. If you hang Goggles you'll have to tell me why later on.'

"And underneath, the paper was signed: 'The Whisperer.' Now you know why Goggles ain't been touched by the law and why it ain't possible to get a jury in these parts to convict him. Here's the paper. I got a hold of it and I've always kept it with me."

He drew it from a vest-pocket and handed it to Patricia—a little scrap torn roughly from a larger sheet, and the words on it were scrawled clumsily in back-hand, like the writing of a child of seven.

"The Whisperer!" frowned Patricia. "Who is he?"

"Don't you even know that?" asked Ugly Joe, in disgust. "Well, you'll hear a pile about him before you been in these parts long. He's a lone rider who hangs out somewhere in them hills. Nobody knows just where; about a'teen posses have hunted for him and never got on his trail. They lay a lot of things to the Whisperer; some of them may be lies, but a pile of them ain't. I *know*! He's a sort of a ghost, the Whisperer is. He rides a white horse that can go like the wind, and he wears light-gray clothes, and a white handkerchief all over his face like a mask. Nobody has ever seen his face, but when he shows up he's known by his voice. It ain't any com-

mon voice. It's a sort of a husky hissing, like something had gone wrong with his throat. It takes the heart out of a man to just hear that voice."

"Yes," murmured Patricia, "it's ghostly; it's horrible! But are you sure that it was really the Whisperer who threw that paper through the window?"

"That's what a lot of people wanted to know, and particularly Lew Lauriston—you know him—old Mort's brother. He didn't think the Whisperer had anything to do with the case. So he got Porky Kennedy, the two-gun man, to go on the trail of Goggles and put him under the sod. There wasn't much of a secret about it. Everybody in Eagles knew that it was about time for Goggles to move on his way, because Porky Kennedy had a long line of killings to his credit already.

"Porky went to Eagles; but Goggles didn't show no special hurry about leaving. Finally Porky went to Widow Morgan's house for supper one night. Everybody sat around the table scared stiff, because they knew that as soon as Goggles came in there'd be a killing and one foreign English dude less in the world. But Goggles didn't come in. They began to think that the fool dude had finally got some sense behind them glasses of his and left for parts unknown. But about the middle of the meal, while Porky was telling a long story, the door opened and the wind blew the flame jumping up and down in the chimney of the lamp.

"And from the door there was a whisper: 'Kennedy!' And when they looked up, there stood the Whisperer with his white mask and his gray clothes and his voiceless voice. Kennedy pulled his gun, but his hand was shaking so that the gun fell out of his hand and rattled on the floor, and Kennedy dropped on his knees against the wall and covered up his face in his arms, moaning like a sick kid.

"But the Whisperer hadn't come for a killing. He just vanished out the door. Pretty soon in comes Goggles and cocks an eye over to Kennedy as calm as you please. But Kennedy wasn't interested in any killing just then. He ups from his chair and climbed through the door in about two

steps. He hasn't been around these parts since. That's one of the good things about the Whisperer. No robber but himself does much flourishing while he's around. There's some say the only ones he picks on is the other crooks. Others say different. I don't know. Well, a couple of days later Lew Lauriston does a fade-away. He didn't even stop to tell us whether the Whisperer had paid him a visit or not, but we just took it for granted.

"If you want to try your hand, Pat, why, it ain't hard to find Eagles, and in Eagles it ain't hard to find Goggles."

But the arrows of this sarcasm flew harmless over the head of Patricia, for she had fallen into a brown study. Certainly it is not easy to understand Patricia, for I suppose that she never really understood herself. I have never known two people, of all who knew her intimately, who could agree about the main points in her character, and I have always attributed the misunderstanding to the fact that she was so unfemininely serious-minded. Really there was nothing masculine about her except a desire to prove herself of some significance in the world, and because she was so pretty she was confronted with an endless struggle to make the world accept her as something more than a mere ornament. Sometimes the very desperation of her efforts to do strong things in a strong way made her as stern and hard as any man, and for this reason quite a few misjudged her—in fact, she misjudged herself. To me there was always something plaintive in the quest of Patricia for herself. At the moment when Ugly Joe ceased speaking, for instance, Patricia was really not thinking of the avenging of Mortimer Lauriston's death. She was merely working out a way in which she could prove to Ugly Joe that there was in her a profound difference from that of his talkative wife. Surely here was a man-sized problem—the apprehension and bringing to justice of a murderer whom even the rough-handed dwellers in the mountain-desert dared not touch.

She said at length: "Has it ever occurred to you, Cousin Joe, that the killer of Mortimer Lauriston was really not your man Goggles at all, but the Whisperer?"

Ugly Joe chuckled.

"Has it taken you all this thinking to get that far? Sure, it's occurred to me, and to everybody else. If you ever seen Goggles you'd be sure of it. I've seen him handle a gun in a shooting-gallery. Say, Pat, he couldn't hit the side of a barn with a rock. And there ain't enough heart in that skinny body of his to hurt a swallow. We all seen that as soon as the Whisperer got mixed up in the case. Mort was fast with his guns and he shot straight. It must of took a man about as good as the Whisperer to beat him on the draw and drill him as clean as that after he'd had a chance to work his shooting-irons."

"The real criminal, then," mused Patricia, "is the Whisperer."

And she shivered a little, but went on: "The other man, this Goggles, is evidently just a harmless little cur. I suppose the Whisperer uses him to collect information and then robs the people Goggles points out to him."

"I s'pose so," nodded Ugly Joe, who was fast losing interest in the conversation.

"And yet you allow Goggles to wander about at liberty! I can't understand you people, Cousin Joe!"

"You would, Pat, if you'd ever had any dealings with the Whisperer. Maybe he's using Goggles and maybe he isn't. We've never had any proof of that. All we know is that he's Goggles's friend, and as long as that's the case there ain't anybody around here with the courage to mix up with Goggles. You can lay to that."

"I know," said Patricia, in the same musing voice, "this Whisperer is a dangerous fellow, but he has his weak point. And I'm going to get him through that weakness!"

"What weakness?" asked Ugly Joe, awakening to a new interest in the case.

"Goggles! The Whisperer may be an outlaw, but he's a man. This Goggles is merely a cowardly little sneak who hides in the terror of the name of the Whisperer. That's why he had the courage to face Mortimer Lauriston. He knew that he could send his man-killer after my cousin. But I'm going to set a trap for the Whisperer, bait it with Goggles, and catch your man for you."

"Going to do which?" gasped Ugly Joe.
 "Wait!" murmured Patricia, and smiled into the contented distance.

CHAPTER IV.

A PLAN FOR TRAPPING.

SHE said after a while: "Cousin Joe, I want you to hire me the four best fighters and straightest shooters you can get. I want four honest men who will—"

"Wait a minute, Pat," answered the other, "I can find you four first-class gunmen and I can find you, maybe, four first-class, honest men; but I'll be—excuse me—if I can get four honest gunmen. They don't come that way. That ain't their brand. It's this way, Patty: Lots of men can shoot straight at anything but another man. It takes something more than a marksman to shoot down a man; it takes a natural killer, and a natural killer ain't often honest."

Patricia sat stiffly erect in her place, but she said firmly: "Then if I have to get a gang of cutthroats—well, the end justifies the means! Get me the gunmen, Cousin Joe, and I'll ask no questions about their honesty. Can you get me four men who won't be afraid to fight with the Whisperer?"

Ugly Joe meditated.

He said: "I see there ain't any use trying to persuade you, Pat. Just like Martha. I can get you four gunmen who'd do any murder for a price. There's Chic Wood. He climbed a tree with a shotgun over at Tomanac and shot a man for fifty dollars. But he'd maybe want fifty thousand for killing the Whisperer. I could get some more like Chic. D'you want to work with men like him, Pat?"

"The end," said Patricia, "justifies the means. Yes, I want any four men—as long as they are dangerous."

"Then I guess I can get 'em. None of the crooks have any special liking for the Whisperer. He's run most of them out of range of Eagles. All you'll have to do is to pay the price. Can you do that?"

"Anything you think they're worth."

"And after you get 'em," said Ugly Joe, "I s'pose you're going to ride through the hills with your posse hunting for the Whisperer?"

"Not at all. I'm going to stay right at your house, Cousin Joe, and wait for the Whisperer to come to me."

"Pat," said Joe solemnly, "if you was a man, I'd say you'd been drinking. Wait for the Whisperer to come to *you*?"

"He will," answered Patricia. "Will you have the four men at the house tomorrow?"

Ugly Joe made no reply, but sighed heavily as he rolled another cigarette. He had heard about this type of Eastern woman, as aggressive as a man, but he hardly knew what to make of her now that she sat at his side. A Westerner is singularly helpless in the presence of a woman. He is accustomed to making his way through a purely physical prowess. Against the peculiar strength of a woman which is fleshly and yet not of the flesh, he has nothing to pit.

So Ugly Joe felt very much like a tongue-tied boy, unable to recite his lesson to the pretty school ma'am. If he resented the calm appropriation of his house as the trap which was to catch the Whisperer, he felt a counterbalancing excitement which more than made up. He had shot mountain-lions in his time, but this would be a rarer sport.

They reached the ranch-house. It was formed of great dove walls from three to four feet in thickness—utterly impervious to the heat of summer or the winds and cold of winter. A one-storied structure, it rambled out in a roomy square around a hexagonal patio in the center. The exterior of that house, dirty-brown, with the deep-set windows gaping like mouths, was quite in keeping with the exterior of Ugly Joe and with the sweep of rough hills and sordid plain on either side in prospect; but the patio within was the special providence of Ugly Joe.

Water, for the internal or external application of which the proprietor had little use, was here lavished upon *flowers*. There were many kinds, and exceedingly bright colors, blended with all the skill with which a Navajo Indian weaves scarlets and yel-

lows into his blanket. About those flowers Martha Gregory wandered with a watering-can in one hand and a short-handled hoe in the other. With the one she dealt life to the flowers. With the other she dealt death to the weeds—a faultless justice. She was taller than Ugly Joe, and her face was even homelier, with a cast of the Scandinavian expressed by high cheek-bones, small eyes, and a perfectly straight mouth so rigidly set that not the least blood-color showed in the lips.

At sight of Patricia Lauriston the hostess dropped her watering-can, and embraced her guest with the liberated arm. There was more strength in that one arm than in any two that Patricia had ever felt, and when she looked up, somewhat breathless, she surprised a smile on the lips of the Amazon. It was like a warm surprise of sunshine on a cloudy day—there was something generously enveloping about it. And Patricia smiled back. After all, there is only one smile for all women when they are kindly moved and genuine. Patricia and "Mother" Martha cast an arm about each other and wandered into the house, completely forgetful of Ugly Joe.

His wife was called "Mother" throughout ten thousand square miles because she had no children and had to vent her tenderness on flowers and broken-down horses and sick children. They still tell the story of how Mother Martha rode fifty miles in the space of a single night—fifty miles through a sand-storm that whipped her face raw—how her horse dropped—how she went on the last miles on foot—and reached the house of Jim Patrick. She saved three lives that time, for Mrs. Patrick gave birth to twins, and the lives of all three hovered at the brink of death for ten days, and were finally drawn back to life by the strong arm of Mother Martha.

That is only one of the stories they tell about Mother Martha. And if Patricia did not know these tales when she first saw her hostess, she must have guessed something of them. For when she passed through the door with Mother Martha, Patricia was extremely glad that she had taken her trip to the mountain-desert, and, as I have said, her arm was about the waist of the Amazon.

And that evening Patricia borrowed one of Mother Martha's gingham dresses, which flapped about her more loosely than a Kanaka woman's Holoku, and went into the kitchen to assist Martha. For the good wife would not keep a cook. No one, it seemed, could cook to please Ugly Joe except herself.

The master of the house had already despatched four riders in four various directions, and late that night, while Patricia sat at the piano—the pride of the house—playing everything from "Suwanee River" to the "Maple Leaf Rag," the four messengers returned, and they brought with them four others. Now the messengers themselves were hardy cow-punchers, not overly gentle in feature or voice or manner, but they were missionary spirits of surpassing sweetness compared with the four accomplished ruffians they brought with them. The heart of a moving-picture director would have swelled almost to bursting if he could have seen them enter, for they were ideal figures for that episode in the third reel where the gang of villains pursues the innocent girl—the same episode, you know, where the gallant United States troopers in turn pursue the villains and arrive just in time to—well, that's the sort our four gunmen were.

Chick Woods came first. His face was built like some great transatlantic liner, chiefly towering hull with diminutive deck works. Upon that massive jaw and swelling jowl, the diminutive nose, little pig eyes and forehead lost under a descending scrag of black hair, were set rather as a suggestion of how the face might be finished off than as a necessary part of the countenance. All that any one would ever remember of Chick would be that jaw and the fanglike teeth and the bull-neck made for hanging on.

Behind him came his antithesis, Harry Yale. He was, as nearly as possible, a figure in one dimension—length. Both his breadth and his thickness were not worth consideration. He looked like a man who had gone without food for a month. There was the blaze of famine in his eyes, for instance, and his cheeks were so sunken that they pulled back the lips at the corners and

made Harry Yale seem to smile. It seemed to Patricia the most unpleasant smile she had ever seen. She was fascinated by the man and could not take her eyes from him when he spoke, for with every utterance the great Adam's apple rolled up and down his throat, as if he were trying to swallow it and could never quite succeed.

As for Bob Riddle, who came third, he was far less repulsive than the other two. He was a half-breed, however, and he carried with him that suggestion of mysterious and inexhaustible malice which even a tenderfoot apprehends in a thoroughly bad Indian. He was quite dignified and very silent, which made him seem more venomous than ever.

Against the ugly background of the other three Jack Tucker was a perfect Apollo. In fact, his good looks had been the ruin of him. They had made him a spoiled child and out of a spoiled childhood he grew into a youth and manhood unable to accept the rebuffs of the world. When the world struck him he struck back, and having a heavy hand and a demon temper, he struck to kill. He had been a gambler for some years, but his killings grew greater than his winnings and he had to move on to fresh fields and pastures new. He was one of those fallen figures which excite no pity because his strength was still great enough to defy the world.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAP IS SET.

AS these worthies filed in, the messengers who had brought them out of the distance, vanished through the open door behind them. The gun-fighters exchanged no kindly greetings.

"Well?" growled Chic Woods.

"Well?" snarled Harry Yale.

"Well?" grunted Bob Riddle.

"Well?" drawled Jack Tucker.

"Don't all ask me," said Ugly Joe, affable but a little shaken by this terse battery. "Here's the lady that got you brought here."

The piano was in shadow in a corner of the room and the piano itself cast a

night-deep, slanting shade over Patricia. She was only visible now, when she rose to greet the instruments of her will, and in rising the light from the lamp fell softly across her face and plashed a little spot of gold on her throat.

"Hell!" snorted Chic Woods at this sudden apparition, and then instantly dragged the hat from his head. The shaggy hair which sprawled in snaky, black locks made him trebly horrible. "'Scuse me, lady."

"Certainly," said Patricia, hunting through her mind for the words with which she must explain her purpose to these grim knights of the mountain-desert.

Here Jack Tucker, smoothing back his long hair and shifting his orange-colored bandanna, stepped forward, hat in hand, as a spokesman more befitting this occasion.

"Me and these other gents," said Tucker graciously, "come here because Ugly Joe sent for us, and he's showed pretty much man to us. But if you want us, you can buy your chips now and start the game. We'll see that it's on the square. I'll be the guy on the stick myself."

The parlance of the gambling-house was unfamiliar to Patricia, but she gathered the general meaning.

"Thank you," she said, "my name is Patricia Lauriston—but Cousin Joe Gregory, there, says that I'll have to be known by a shorter name. He has suggested Pat."

"Which I'll agree is a good name," said Tucker. "I'm sure glad to know you. I'm Jack Tucker. This is Chic Woods, here's Harry Yale, and this is Bob Riddle."

She managed to keep her smile steady and shook hands with them each in turn.

"Now," she said to Ugly Joe, "shall I explain why we sent for them, or will you?"

"Pat," said Ugly Joe, "first, last, and all the time this is your party, and run by yourself."

"Very well," she answered. "I've come from the East with a purpose in which I'll need the help of several men who can shoot straight and have the courage to fight. Cousin Joe suggested you. I want to hire you. It may be hard work, so that you can practically name your own prices."

"Seeing it's you," said the gallant Tuck-

er, and he bowed, "I'm here willing to do any of my little specialties at half rates. What about you, boys?"

Their eyes had held like the bright eyes of four birds upon the deadly fascination of a snake. To men who ride alone in the mountain-desert, the very name "woman" is synonymous of purity, beauty, and grace; in the presence of Patricia they stood awed, and their admiration, and their grunt of assent, thrilled her more than any tribute from her cultured friends of the East.

"Wait a minute," said Ugly Joe, "while I horn in a bit. What she wants is for you to get the Whisperer. I thought that would change you a bit!"

The effect of the name had been magical. Bob Riddle leaped back to the door and peered out into the night. Harry Yale and Jack Tucker jumped back to back and stood crouching a little, as though ready to fight a host of foes; while Chic Woods whipped out two guns and stood with them poised. Patricia shrank back against the wall.

"Steady," called Ugly Joe, after he had enjoyed the full effect of his announcement for an instant. "I said she wanted you to get the Whisperer. I didn't say he was *here*."

They relaxed, but cautiously. Riddle turned only partly from the door; Chic Woods restored his weapons to their holsters, but kept his right hand still in position for a lightning draw.

But what Patricia saw, oddly enough, was not the men before her, but him whose name had produced this panic among man-killers. She visioned him in one swift flare of sure knowledge—big, silent, neither handsome nor ugly, but simply dangerous!

"As a matter of fact," said Patricia, "I am not even going to ask you to expose yourselves by hunting for the Whisperer through the hills. I simply want you to stay here and be ready to fight when the Whisperer comes. For he *shall* come. Will you stay?"

They stayed, and the next day Patricia rode alone toward Eagles. Behind her the trap was ready, a strong trap with four teeth of steel, and more, because in time of need all the cow-punchers of Cousin

Joe Gregory could be summoned. What she needed to make that trap effective was to secure the efficient bait, and already she was tasting the joys of victory. She had no difficulty in finding the house of the Widow Morgan, and there, on the front veranda, sat Goggles. She was at a little distance when she spied him and knew him at once by the description. He wore riding-boots so highly polished that from the distance they glittered like mirrors, and his riding trousers were of a mouse-colored whip-cord, buttoned snugly below the narrow knees. His loose pongee shirt fluttered with the puff of wind, and he lay easily back in his chair, with his slender hands locked behind his head.

Patricia was irritated, and chiefly by the fact that he seemed so cool. She herself was very hot from the keenness of the sun and labor of the hard ride. She swung from her horse and mounted to the veranda. The nearer view merely proved what she had surmised from the distance. His face was very lean and pale, and behind the great, black-rimmed spectacles, large and pathetic eyes of soft brown stared out at the world. He was finished by a dapper little mustache. It did not extend clear across the upper lip, but was merely a decorative dab in the center. At her approach he turned his head carelessly and she noted that his face did not light as the faces of most men did when she came near.

With her whole heart Patricia despised him. If he had been himself a slayer of men she would almost have admired him—there is a place of esteem for a dangerous man; but this decorative, smooth, lithe sneak who lived in the shadow of a great outlaw's protection and like a jackal preyed on the leavings of the lion's meal—her disgust stormed up strongly in her throat. It made her face hard, indeed.

Seeing her pause by him, Goggles arose, with just that touch of lingering hesitancy which indicates the courtesy of habit and breeding rather than the attention of natural kindness. He rose, smiled automatically, and offered his chair. Without the slightest hesitancy Patricia slipped into it and sat calmly staring up to him.

If she had hoped to irritate him, however,

she was totally disappointed. He did not even seem surprised, but leaned against the rail of the veranda, brushing his little mustache with a very slender finger-tip, and looking for all the world as if he had been merely keeping the chair in trust for her. Patricia was quite sure that the man's blood was no warmer than that of a fish. She pictured him, in one of those quick visions of hers, fawning and cringing in the presence of the Whisperer. Indeed, being the servant of such a grim master gave the fellow a sort of dignity. She had to admit it unwillingly. She could only wonder that a lone rider of the mountain-desert could choose so despicable a tool. The man was hardly taller than herself and certainly not a great deal heavier. The only admirable physical characteristic about him was a certain suggestion of lightness for speed. She had seen famous sprinters who had the same delicate, almost perfectly round wrists and ankles, the same marvelously slender hands and feet. His foot, in fact, though it was somewhat longer, was hardly a jot wider than her own.

These details Patricia gathered in that first steady, rather insolent stare.

Then she said: "Thank you for the chair, Mr. St. Gore. I've just come in from a long ride—very hot, you know, and a little tired."

"Ah!" drawled St. Gore without the slightest meaning in his voice, and then, acting upon sudden inspiration: "By jove, the Widow Morgan has just made a pitcher of delightfully cool lemonade. May I bring you a glass?"

"Thanks!" said Patricia. "No."

"No? It's really very palatable lemonade—not made with the wretched extract."

"Indeed?" said Patricia.

"Quite so," babbled Goggles, "and the pitcher is so cold—well, there's frost on it, you know!"

The description sent a burning pang of thirst down Patricia's throat and plunging hotly into her vitals, but now that she had first refused she could not well change her mind. Unquestionably she hated the fellow with her whole soul.

"My name," she broke in, "is Patricia Lauriston."

She waited for the name to take effect—waited for the guilty start—the flush—the pallor of the coward. Instead he merely stared curiously—a faint curiosity—toward her, and then past her, as if he were lost at the instant in the drifting of a pale, far-off cloud.

"Really," murmured Goggles, "I'm so happy to know you, Miss Lauriston."

Patricia leaned forward to give the first sharp home-stroke.

CHAPTER VI.

BAIT FOR THE TRAP.

"I AM the cousin," she said, "of that Lauriston whose murder you accomplished through the Whisperer."

At this he started, indeed. Not sharply; it was merely a sudden and rather hurt glance down at her face, studying her as if he wondered what manner of creature she might be.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Goggles at last. "You are not going to bring up that hideous old affair?"

"I have come several thousand miles for that exact purpose," said Patricia, and the rage which she had been controlling took her by the throat like a gripping hand, so that her voice trembled and went small. For her whole soul revolted at the thought of that stalwart cousin of hers done to death through this paltry cur. She concluded: "And having come so far, I'm certainly going to do my best to bring matters to a crisis."

Goggles sank back against the rail and trailed slender fingers across that broad, pale forehead.

"Every one," he complained drearily, "has been simply wretched to me since the death of that vulgar fellow, and now you come. Well, I'm very glad that you know it was the Whisperer, and not I, who committed the murder."

"No," said Patricia with a fine disdain, "all your part was to call on the bloodhound and set him at the trail of a man you did not have the heart to face by yourself."

"Oh!" said Goggles, and shrank a little

away from her. "You don't seem to like me, do you?"

She could not help laughing. The inanity of the fellow was both disgusting and comic. Her laugh jarred to an abrupt stop.

"Do you think it strange, Mr. St. Gore?"

"Really, you know," said St. Gore, "I've tried most awfully not to offend you. If my manners have been bad I know you will excuse me. You see, I'm a little troubled with absent-mindedness."

"H-m!" grumbled Patricia, and she seemed very masculine and formidable as she frowned thoughtfully down at him. "The more I see of you, Mr. St. Gore, I wish that I could do to you what I am going to do to the Whisperer."

He was frankly, guilelessly interested at once.

"Oh, are you going to do something to the Whisperer?"

"I am going to see him captured," said Patricia smoothly, "and either shot down or else hanged from the highest cotton-wood-tree on the ranch."

"Dear me!" cried Goggles, distressed, "you're such a violent person, aren't you?"

"And I'm almost sorry to have it done," went on Patricia, "because something in me admires the man in spite of his crimes. At least he has strength and courage and power of action. I wish—I wish that some one of your nature were to be in his place."

"Like me!" gasped poor Goggles, and he edged further away along the rail.

"Stand where you are!" cried Patricia sternly.

He stopped with a jerk, and his eyes widened.

"But I can't do that," she went on, and paused to meditate.

"I wonder," began St. Gore timidly, as if he feared that she would snap at him in the middle of his question—"I wonder how you will attack the Whisperer. He has never killed a woman—but I suppose he would—he's such a terrible fellow. Quite uncontrollable, you know."

"Perhaps," said Patricia, "you have heard of Chic Woods, Harry Yale, Jack Tucker, and Bob Riddle?"

"Oh, yes," murmured Goggles, "and I don't think you could have named four

rougher men. Really, you know, they are the sort one doesn't mention—in certain places."

"I have hired them," said Patricia calmly, "to do the work which the law could not or would not perform."

She considered him again, thoughtfully.

"And in some way I'm going to use you, Mr. St. Gore, but just how I can't tell."

The man seemed to have a special talent for asinine expression of face—utter emptiness of eye. But now a dawn of intelligence lighted his eyes.

"By jove!" he cried, and straightening he clapped his hands together and laughed with soft glee to himself. "I have it!"

"Have what?" asked Patricia.

"You see," explained Goggles eagerly, "it's been useful now and then, but on the whole an awful nuisance to have the Whisperer trailing me about. I'd give almost anything to have the rude fellow—er—disappear!"

"You would?"

"So suppose I go out to your ranch and act—well, as a sort of bait for your trap. The Whisperer is sure to follow me. He's like my shadow, in fact."

"Do you mean to say," said Patricia slowly, "that you would actually help to betray him—your friend—your benefactor—no matter what he has been to the rest of the world?"

"Now," said Goggles deprecatingly, "you are thinking hard things of me again, aren't you? But the Whisperer is an awful burden for any one—and I'm quite too nervous to have him always around. It would be a most enormous relief to get rid of him."

She closed her eyes and drew a deep breath. The shameless ingratitude and treachery of the fellow blinded her.

"But how," she said, when she could speak again, "could I be sure that once on the ranch you would not sneak away the first time the Whisperer approached you?"

"That's very simple," said Goggles brightly, "I'll give you my word not to leave until you say that I may go."

"And you won't ride out and tell the Whisperer all of our plan? Bah! he would wring it out of you through fear!"

"Well," said Goggles thoughtfully, "I suppose he might, but that would only make him stay the closer. He doesn't fear anything, you know, and he would laugh at the thought of any four men taking him. Even such men as you have. Did you say Jack Tucker is one of them?"

"He is," said Patricia, and in spite of herself she began to almost admire the cat-like cunning of the dapper little Easterner. "I see your plan, and I suppose that a man like the Whisperer would take the challenge of my—trap—as a sort of sporting proposition. Being your friend, he would try to make me release you—try to make me give you your freedom."

She straightened, her eyes shining.

"And that would bring him at last face to face with me. I don't ask anything more."

"You take my breath—you really do," said Goggles, "but if the plan suits you, suppose I go pack my grip? I'm all ready to start."

"Certainly," said Patricia, and her scornful glance followed him through the door.

He reappeared, carrying a bulky suitcase, tightly strapped and bulging at the sides. His horse was led around at the same time and the suit-case strapped behind the saddle securely.

On the way out he had little to say. He seemed more amazed than intimidated, and at this she wondered, until she was able to explain it to herself through the fact that the man trusted all things implicitly to the Whisperer, and had grown so accustomed to the infallibility of the outlaw that he did not dream of worrying over any predicament. In fact, there seemed no place for worry in the mindlessness of the fellow. Worry, after all, suggests thought, and that was something, apparently, which never burdened the brain of Mr. St. Gore. Once he brought his horse, a fine animal, to a sharp halt in order that he might gaze upon a cloud of singular shape which floated down the western sky. Now and then he broke his silence to speak to his horse in a conversational manner, as one might speak to any rational being.

To Patricia, in fact, looking from the

fine, high-held head of the horse to the bespectacled face of the rider, it seemed that the brute was by far the higher type of animal. They were in sight of Ugly Joe's place before the fop directly addressed her.

He said: "I presume that I shall have protection against these—er—ruffians of yours, Miss Lauriston?"

"I shall personally," she answered, "be your guarantee."

"Will you really?" he queried gratefully. "Awfully thrilling to have your interest, you know!"

She looked at him sharply. In almost any other man the speech would have been a subtle jest, but his face was more blankly serious than she had seen it, as yet. They dismounted at the central entrance, opening on the patio. Here Goggles cried out sharply and ran forward a few steps with his arms outthrown. He whirled sharply on Patricia, his face ecstatic.

"Miss Lauriston!" he cried. "I've been thinking it rather queer of you to bring me away out here, but now I thank you—I positively do! I haven't seen flowers like these since I left—"

His arms dropped—his face grew grave and almost drawn.

"I beg your pardon?" queried Patricia lightly.

"I beg yours," answered Vincent St. Gore, and he bowed with something which almost approached a gentleman's quiet dignity. "I shouldn't have commenced a sentence which I may not finish."

To Patricia it was as if a cloth of bright, simple colors were suddenly reversed, and on the other side she saw some marvelously intricate design; so much one touch of gravity did to all her preconceptions of the man, and all her knowledge of him as she had seen him this day. Ugly Joe, crossing from one side of the patio to the other, stopped short.

"Hello!" he called. "You got your bird, eh, Pat?"

"You see him," she answered.

Ugly Joe approached to within reaching distance of Goggles, who adjusted his spectacles and leaned forward to peer at the newcomer. Ugly Joe grew ugly indeed.

"Listen to me, my hearty," snarled the

rancher, who had been at sea in his time, and whose walk still oddly suggested, at times, the heaving deck of an imaginary ship. "Listen to me: You're out here because the lass wants you here for reasons of her own. Maybe she's told you about them. Now I'll tell you one other thing: Don't be lingering around when you find me alone. I can stand the sight of you, maybe, when there's witnesses near by, but when I see you alone I want to fix my fingers in that skinny windpipe of yours. Understand? You damned, sneaking cutthroat!"

And Ugly Joe turned on his heel, after a farewell glare, and stalked on toward the nearest door with his wobbly stride, lifting high to meet the imaginary deck.

CHAPTER VII.

GOGGLES TALKS.

"MY word!" sighed Goggles. "Who is that person?"

"That," said Patricia coldly, "is my cousin, Joe Gregory."

"Isn't he the rough chap, though?"

"Ah!" she cried, with a sudden, overwhelming burst of disgust. "Can you call yourself a man? You would shame a dog—a creeping, whining—dog!"

And she turned and ran from him. She was shuddering with shame and horror in the thought that such a craven, such a spineless cur, could be a man, walk and talk and think like a man, and yet be at heart such a travesty on all noble qualities of a man. More sickening, because his admiration of the flowers a moment before had made him almost akin to him—had brought a sudden softening and sympathy into her heart. She despised herself for it now—loathed herself, as though she had touched the face of a leper, and the touch had made her unclean, forever.

By contrast she drew the figure of the Whisperer. Perhaps at some time in his career a service had been rendered him by this cravenly scoundrel, St. Gore, and now, to pay the debt, he constituted himself a strong and invisible shield between the craven and the world. More and more details of the Whisperer's character were

creeping up strongly in her imagination. He was large, undoubtedly, since so many tales were told of his prowess. And that whispering voice, so horrible to hear, was undoubtedly the result of some incurable affliction. She had heard of men with consumption of the throat, which affected their vocal chords so that their voices became like that ascribed to the Whisperer.

Without doubt the man had come to the Southwest to be cured of his affliction by the purer, drier air. To support himself he had been forced into a life of outlawry. Then this sneaking dapper fiend, St. Gore, tracked the man whom he had befriended in some small thing years before, and lived off the earnings of the Whisperer's dare-devil depredations. In the mean time the outlaw was dying slowly of his malady, but would be terrible until the end.

This was the story which grew up of itself in her thoughts, until it seemed to her that she could not bear to face St. Gore again. The temptation to shoot him down—kill him like a snake—would be too great.

It was into this stormy mood of hers that harmonious music ran. In fact, it was so akin to her thoughts of the moment that she hardly noticed it at first, and only gradually it grew out distinctly upon her. It was some one playing on the piano in the distant room, the Revolutionary Etude by Chopin, and playing it with consummate strength and mastery.

Not an easy thing to do, as she knew by experience, but this musician played with easy perfection. The difficult bass, which must roll, but not thunder, swept by in a vast rhythm like great ground-swellers which roll along and toss the ship, and in turn block out either horizon and tower darkly into the heart of the sky. She had seen such waves, and she saw them again in the music. The treble darted across the scheme of harmony like sharp, stabbing bursts of lightning, illuminating the whole scene. The Revolutionary Etude—a study in conflict, in an ominous and rising danger like the passion which had held her a moment before.

She left her room and wandered toward the place from which the music came,

paused at the door, and then went sick with disgusted disappointment.

It was Vincent St. Gore who sat at the piano. He turned a blank face upon her, finished his passage faultlessly, and then rose.

"The bass," he said, "is in good shape, but the whole upper register is a shade out of tune—flat."

She merely stared helplessly at him. He had passed to an Indian basket suspended from the ceiling near a window and holding a flower-pot full of crimson blossoms marked with streaks of jet. The large petals were like velvet. Now he turned the basket so that the sunshine in turn streamed softly over each flower—turned it with a lingering delight, and the expression of his face was such as she had seen when he first saw the flowers in the patio.

"Isn't it strange?" he said, turning to her, "that such a rough creature as your cousin Gregory should keep flowers. Or perhaps it's his wife?"

"I think," said Patricia dryly, "that they are both capable of appreciating flowers."

"Really?" he said, and as usual, when aroused, he shifted his spectacles and peered through them at her. "Very odd, though, isn't it, that they should have the passion?"

"Why?" she asked. It was a burden even to listen to him, and a trial of patience.

"Because," he answered, "it's out of harmony. They love one beautiful thing, and all the rest is discord."

"Perhaps," said Patricia, "they have other qualities just as important."

"Impossible," said Goggles, and shook his head decisively. "There are no others as important as the love of beauty."

"If you feel that way," said Patricia, "I wonder that you can tolerate these people."

"Quite right," answered Goggles, nodding seriously, "but I don't tolerate them, you see. I see no more of them than I do of individual clouds when all the sky is dark. I don't talk like this to them—oh, never!"

"It would be unhealthy for you if you did, perhaps," said Patricia scornfully.

"Would it?" said Goggles, and canted his head thoughtfully to one side. "Yes, I suppose these creatures would resent criticism with physical violence."

He shrugged his shoulders; it was a shudder of aversion which shook his entire body.

"However," he said, "I have never bothered talking with them about these things. It would be like sowing the wind, don't you think?"

"Exactly," said Patricia, "and like reaping the whirlwind afterward, eh?"

"I don't quite follow you there," said Goggles, "unless you mean that they might actually strike me? Dear me! I suppose that is possible. One never knows what to expect. Not in these wilds. However, with you there is some difference."

"Hope for me?" asked Patricia.

He considered her with that thoughtfully canted head.

"I should really warn you," he smiled, "that I've acquired a brutal frankness out here in the mountain-desert."

"I'm so glad," said Patricia. "It's the one—"

She stopped, but Goggles finished the sentence smoothly for her.

"The one manly characteristic you've found in me? Quite so! Oh, I don't in the least mind people saying such things to me. I've grown quite used to them."

And he smirked at her. She had to grip her hands to keep from striking him across the thin-lipped mouth.

"You were saying," she remarked, "that there may be a hope for me?"

"Did I say that? I didn't mean to. No, a woman rarely develops. She is, on the whole, a fixed quantity, and only varies in vanity. You don't mind, do you? I'm quite impersonal."

"My dear Mr. St. Gore," sighed Patricia, "nothing you say can possibly offend me. Go on!"

"Now isn't that comfortable!" breathed the little man. "I foresee some charming chats with you. You have possibilities, I should say, rather of appreciation than of execution. You would not in the least surprise me, for instance, if I heard you discuss an art with intelligence, but I should

be much astounded if you performed anything with distinction. You follow me?"

"H-m!" said Patricia.

"You will attempt to remedy this defect since I have called it to your attention, but after a few years you will see that I am right about it; a woman never varies, except in degree. You will abandon the effort to create."

She was beginning to forget what the man looked like. She was hearing only the light, smooth voice. She was drifting away into the sea of the discussion.

"There are other things," said Patricia desperately. "There are other things I can do. There is a world of action."

"A world of action," said the little man serenely. "You can give birth to children, love your husband because he provides the food for yourself and your offspring, and rock a cradle. Within whose limits there is almost nothing to which you may not aspire in the world of action. That must be quite clear to you."

"H-m!" said Patricia.

"But after all," went on Goggles, "what is the world of action? What becomes of it? What do we know of the great financiers and bridge-builders and lawmakers and statesmen? You can number on your two hands the few to whom certain poets have deigned to give immortality. No, your practical man, your man of action, rots away into oblivion as rapidly as his name rots away on the headstone of his grave.

"What is left of Egypt? The mind that conceived the Sphinx and the author of the story of 'Cinderella.' What of the heroes of Greece, her captains of industry? They are gone except as some poet names them on a random page. And the poets of Greece? You can run the list into scores. We read them as we read Milton and Shakespeare. Well, to get down to modern days, consider Shakespeare. Now, can you tell me, off-hand, who commanded the English fleet against the Armada?"

"No," said Patricia, "I can't."

"It was a certain Lord Howard, I think. But surely in his day he was considered much greater than the obscure fellow who pushed a pen and acted the part of a ghost

and finally settled down in a pleasant little village to die like a commonplace farmer. Yes, in those days no man would have hesitated to choose between the fate of a Lord Howard and that of a Shakespeare. But time is the acid test. Time rusts away all your strong iron and leaves only the gold untouched—only the gold—only the beauty. It is the one thing you cannot resist.

"For instance, I called you out of a distant part of the house with music. Because I play that Etude in a certain way you have to listen to me although you despise me, d'you see? And after I've gone on you'll think over what I've said, though you're too proud to ask more questions now."

She slumped into a chair.

"I'm not too proud," she said. "I *do* despise you—but I want to listen."

"Well," said Goggles, "I like to talk, for that matter. Almost any audience will do for me when I get started. Even my horse!"

He smiled, and, musing upon this absurdity, he drew out a monogrammed cigarette-case, and offered it to her. She refused sharply.

"Ah," said Goggles, withdrawing the case and selecting and lighting his smoke, "you don't smoke? Now, that's rarely stupid of you. You miss a great opportunity; nothing like smoking to set off hands like yours."

She folded her arms to conceal those hands.

"Now!" he said. "You wish to seem angry, but secretly you're a little pleased, aren't you?"

"Yes," said the girl, "I like appreciation, no matter from whom it comes."

"Not so well said," answered the dictator of tastes. "Injudicious appreciation is worse than useless. It clogs the mind with inaccuracies. The common herd, for instance, thought much of both Tennyson and Browning in their day."

"But you dislike them?"

"Dislike them? No. When I was a boy I rather enjoyed them. Then I discovered that Tennyson has nothing to say and knows exceedingly well how to say it;

while Browning has a great deal to say, but was never able to utter a single sustained rhythm. Now, in your remark of a moment ago you were trying to make a hit at my comment about audiences. You missed my point. One talks *with* a companion; one talks *at* an audience."

"You are certainly very clear," said the girl.

"Insultingly so?"

"You could never insult me."

"Only weary you, I suppose. And now?"

"I'm intensely interested. Because you pay some attention to the subject which most fascinates me—myself."

The eyes of Goggles flashed with enjoyment.

"That's bully," he chuckled. "Simply bully! You *are* interesting, but not in the way men have told you."

"Oh!" said Patricia.

He was like a dissector, cutting toward the heart of her being, naming each muscle as he passed it.

"You have," said the merciless critic, "the three most important qualities for a woman, their importance ranking in the order named: a sound body—apparently—a beautiful face, and a receptive mind. You have also, in the order named, the three greatest vices of modern woman: ambition, discontent, and respect for your *mind*. You are interesting through the clash of qualities."

"And you are under the impression that I will become—"

"Either a virtuous wife and the discontented mother of many children, or the mistress of a great man, and the discontented mother of barren thoughts."

She sank further back in her chair, regarding him with awe and aversion. It seemed to Patricia that the book of her future was being read with infallible wisdom.

"Which had you rather be?" smiled Goggles.

"I had rather die than be either!" cried Patricia.

"Ah!" said the little man, and raised a forefinger. "Then there is hope for you!"

And after that she could not get another word from him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MESSAGE FROM THE NIGHT.

ODDLY enough that interview increased her respect for the Whisperer rather than for St. Gore. She saw another reason now why the outlaw should cling to this dapper little fop and extend over him the dark cloak of his protection. It was because the outlaw had been a man of culture and had been ostracized from the paths of civilized men. All that he saved from the wreckage was the friendship and occasional meetings with this St. Gore, this absurd little dude with his cold, keen mind.

If she did not utterly despise St. Gore now, she looked upon him as men look upon some ingenious mechanism which does the work of a man—and yet is not a man. She felt almost as impersonally as this about St. Gore.

Apparently he had the most complete trust in the protection of the Whisperer. For instance, when he sat opposite the four gun-fighters at the table that night, he looked at them rather with curiosity than with fear, and studied them with such an intent look that Patricia wished for the tenth time that he would lay aside those absurd, owl-like spectacles.

Indeed, it was the spectacles which gave most of the folly to the face of Goggles. Without them it would have been an interesting, intellectually handsome face. With them, it became a mere mask of inanity. However, she had known men like this before, men with minds, but no bodies—men dead below the brain. A typical product of one phase of the twentieth century.

The gun-fighters regarded Goggles with a curiosity fully equal to his own and much more openly expressed. They were like four great hunting-dogs surrounding the weak, defenseless cub of the bear, but daring not touch it for fear of the terrible coming of the dam. They measured Goggles across his broad forehead and his narrow cheeks—they measured him across his slen-

der shoulders and through his thin chest. Once Chic Woods, speaking in an aside like a mutter of thunder to Bob Riddle, stretched out his fingers and then closed them slowly—a suggestive gesture, as if he were crushing some fragile object filled with life. Yet for some time no one directly addressed Goggles; the cloak of his master's awful power fell like an invisible sense of awe about him.

Finally, however, Jack Tucker said: "Maybe you don't know, Goggles, that I've figured out who the Whisperer is?"

"How extremely interesting!" said Goggles, and smiled benignantly upon the rufian. "Do you really, though!"

"You're damn right I do—'scuse me, lady," said Tucker, "and there was one beside me that knew—old Mort Lauriston."

"Well, well," said Goggles, "you've no idea how interested the Whisperer will be when I tell him that his identity has been penetrated."

"Whatever that means," growled Tucker, "but you can tell the old bird that he's known, all right. Maybe you'd like to hear the story?"

"Indeed!" drawled Goggles with enthusiasm.

"By all means," said Patricia.

"It was back a few years when the first paying ore was struck over by the Mugg-yon Hills," said Tucker. "I was laying about Eagles when one day old Mort Lauriston came driving up to me and says he'd like to have me slide out into the hills with him to a place where he thought he'd got the right color, but he wanted to get my opinion before he got his claim papers.

"I climbed a hoss and we went out into the hills, and there, right on the place where Mort had been digging, was Pa."

"Pa?" queried Patricia.

"I was coming to that. There was a chap come out to Eagles from the East. Awful green tenderfoot. He said his name was Peter Askworthy Howe, but the initials on his suit-case was 'P. A. H.,' so we called him Pa right off the jump.

"Wasn't a bad sort, laying aside the funny way he talked. Anyway, it was Pa who'd come along and seen the marks

of Mort's digging. He'd opened up the stuff himself, and being a rock-hound he seen the first glance that there was plenty of color—real stuff. So he staked out a claim. We come down and allowed to him that Mort had the first jump on that spot. He told us to go to—well, not just in them words, him being particular polite, always.

"He allowed that he was going into Eagles to get his papers. Well, we knew that he'd beat us on a ride, because he had a pretty nice piece of hoss-flesh with him. He climbed into the saddle and then I shot the hoss.

"Sort of peeved this Pa, because he ups and grabs his gun. Which was some foolish move, considering how fast Mort was with his six. He put three chunks of lead into Pa's chest inside a space the size of your palm. Of course the tenderfoot didn't have no chance.

"He didn't die for a minute, and before he kicked out, he rolls himself over on his back—he was a big gent—and pulls himself up on his hands.

"'Lauriston,' he says, 'you and Tucker will never enjoy the money you make out of this mine. My brother will track me, and he'll learn who killed me. He'll kill you, my fine fellows, and if you started riding now you could never ride far enough away or hide so well that you could get away from him.'

"With that he kicked out. Now, I got a considerable respect for what a dying man says, and I allow that the Whisperer is the brother of old Pa. Yep, his name is Howe and he's filled one part of his bet by getting Mort Lauriston. The other part is to get me. I knew the Whisperer was on my trail, and that's why I've been so scarce around these parts lately. I figured he'd a good chance of bumping me off while I was alone. But now that I've got these three bunkies I guess he's out of luck. What say, Chic?"

"I'll tell the world he's out of luck!" growled Chic.

"Damn his eyes!" broke in Ugly Joe. "When he finds them, he finds me with 'em. Listen to the wind, lads! Glad we're in port to-night!"

For the gale had risen suddenly and now

made the stanch dove walls quiver time and again, and little drafts set the flames jumping in the lamps. Mrs. Gregory rose to fasten the shades on the western and windward side of the house, and, opening a window to do this, a piece of paper, evidently inserted under the edge of the window for this very purpose, whipped from the sill and came fluttering across the room like a white bird, settling gently on the center of the table.

Jack Tucker, cursing softly, leaned forward and snatched up the paper, unfolded it, and read aloud, slowly, with a grim-set face:

"Gents, I've been waiting for you a long time. I never expected to get you all together. Harry Yale, you come first.

THE WHISPERER."

He tossed it down for examination by any who cared to look. Gingerly, like men touching deadly poison, they raised the little paper one by one and examined the clumsy, scrawling writing. It was back-hand, and the letters were formed with the same crude care that a child of seven uses.

"At least," said Patricia thoughtfully—and she and Goggles were the only calm people in the room, "it proves one thing. The Whisperer is not your man Howe. This is some uneducated man from the mountain-desert. Look at his writing! Isn't that a sufficient proof?"

"Ma'am," said Chic Woods hoarsely, "nothing proves anything about the Whisperer. I don't mind a man—but a damned ghost—"

His eyes traveled across to Harry Yale. The tall man stood like one transfixed, swallowing hard, so that the great Adam's apple jumped up and down his throat. Through that bronze tan he could not show pallor, but his lips seemed to have grown harder set, and they were pulled toward the hollows of his cheeks by the ghastliest of grins. In the silence that followed every glance turned finally upon Harry Yale.

He stood it for a moment, and then in a sudden fury he pushed back his chair, rose, and smashed his great, bony hand down on the table.

"Am I dead already?" he roared. "I ain't any ghost now, am I? Look somewhere's else—and to hell with you all!"

He strode to the door, hesitated with his hand on the knob, and then jerked it suddenly open, and stood tense, staring into the dark beyond. He closed the door, disappearing into the further room. Chic Woods raised a shaking hand and mopped his forehead.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECOND AND THIRD MESSAGES.

PATRICIA, with her four gun-fighters, felt like a general with mighty forces to direct. It was she who planned the campaign for the next day. She schemed in this way: First of all, Goggles was almost certain to use his freedom at once and ride out to meet the Whisperer, whom he would supply with accurate information concerning all that went on in the house. Her plan was to trail Goggles when he rode out, using Harry Yale to do the trailing, because Harry had now the most vital reason for wishing to get at the great outlaw. One man could probably trail the inexperienced Goggles very easily, and the other three in turn would follow Yale at a safe distance, scattered out on either side of him.

In case Yale were to find the Whisperer they could gallop in at once to his assistance, enveloping the outlaw.

She disclosed her plan to the four men, and they agreed readily. Any plan was a good plan to them. What they wanted was action, and quick action to get at the common enemy.

She proved a true prophet. Almost immediately after breakfast Goggles sauntered out toward the barn and a few minutes later was riding toward the hills at a brisk gallop. He was not out of sight before Harry Yale, spurring at every stride, raced after him, and behind Harry, at a short interval, came his three companions.

Patricia, from the kitchen door, watched them disappear with a smile of content. The Whisperer, certainly, would expect some dilatoriness in the campaign against

him, some waiting for his nearer approach, some elaborately calculated ambushade. This quick action, nine chances out of ten, would throw him off his guard. And in the presence of four men like Yale and the others, one mistake would be the last. She felt a queer pain, as well, at the thought that through her this wild scourge should be removed from the mountain-desert. No matter how terrible he might be, it would be like the shooting of an eagle—a grim thing to see the air robbed of its lord and its tyrant.

By noon the riders had not returned. In the dusk of the evening Woods, Riddle, and Tucker, hot, weary, discomfited, trotted up to the barn and came in silence to the house. In the first wild burst of speed Harry Yale, better mounted than the others, and riding without caution, had outstripped the others, and they had lost him in the windings of the hills. All the rest of the day they stalked him, but could never get his trail again. They told this tale to Ugly Joe. To Patricia they would not speak at all. She had been the general, and she had failed her army in time of need. For her own part, a sense of guilt oppressed her. Somewhere out there in the gathering dark the tall form of Harry Yale must lie motionless. Over it the buzzards, perhaps, were already gathering.

In the midst of her despair there was a shout from outside the house, and she ran out to see the form of a horseman rapidly maturing through the dark.

"Hey, Harry!" called the chorus of his bunkies.

But after a moment, a soft, thin voice answered: "Halloo, there!"

"Goggles!" groaned Chic Woods.

"Goggles!" said Patricia, and she wished him heartily a thousand leagues under the honest earth.

He came, trailing his feet with weariness, having put up his horse in the barn.

"My word!" sighed Goggles. "Will you believe that I was lost in those wretched hills? Yes, indeed! I should hardly have found the house if I hadn't seen the lights at last! Think of wandering all night through those hills! I'm going straight to my room!"

And he went. The others settled down at the entrance to the patio to wait. They were silent; for an hour the only sound and sigh was the occasional scratch and blue spurt of a match. They were thinking of Harry Yale, and they were thinking of death.

But at the very moment that Ugly Joe finally rose and turned toward the house, they caught the patter of trotting hoofs through the night, hoofs that clapped the earth more loudly, chugging in the sand at last directly before the house as the horse came to a halt. They were too excited to challenge the rider.

"Halloo!" called the voice of Harry Yale.

A happy cheer answered him. Woods and Riddle ran toward him.

"Stay where y'are!" barked Harry Yale. "I got an oath not to stop with you."

"You met him?" called Patricia.

"I'm saying nothin' except this thing," answered Harry Yale: "Bob Riddle, you're the next to go. That's straight from the Whisperer."

"Wait!" called Chic Woods. "Yale, y'ain't going to leave us up in the air like this?"

"Chic, if you come near me I'll start a gun-play. I'm under 'n oath higher 'n heaven and deeper 'n hell. S'long."

And the hoofs started again, and chugged softly away through the night, fainter, fainter, until the last patter died out. As for the men, none of them stirred, but Patricia fled back into the house and found Mother Martha.

"I want to stay with you to-night!" she pleaded. "I'm afraid!"

"Of what, honey?" asked Mother Martha.

"Of ghosts!" said Patricia. "Of ghosts!"

"I'm older 'n you, Patty," answered Martha, "and I've seen a pile more of the ways of the mountain-desert. You'll never get the Whisperer this way. He'll hunt down men one by one, just the way he did Harry Yale to-day. Poor Harry Yale. He's done for. To-morrow he'll take water from a Chinaman. That's the way of the Whisperer. If he don't kill the body of a man,

he kills the heart, which is worse, a lot."

"I won't give it up!" said Patricia. "I daren't give it up!"

"Why not, honey? Who elected you a man-hunter?"

"It's the first thing I've tried by myself—the first real work. I've got to win! and I *will* win, because he can't beat me until I release St. Gore from his parole with my own lips."

"Patty," said Mother Martha, "I've seen stranger things than that happen on the mountain-desert."

Not a comforting thought for Patricia to carry away to her bed. She lay awake long considering it. For how, after all, could the Whisperer force her against her will to retract the parole of St. Gore? Perhaps at the point of his revolver; perhaps by striking down Ugly Joe—and even Mother Martha. Yes, to the Whisperer neither man nor woman made a difference.

When she finally slept it was only to dream of a great weight that pressed down on her, an invisible burden that beat against her out of the thin air like the wings of some tremendous, ethereal moth, suffocating her, pressing her resistlessly to the ground, killing her in the very sight of her friends.

She woke the next morning with little violet circles painted beneath her eyes, and in her throat a steady burning. The rest of the household was already at the breakfast-table, in silence, and when she entered every one looked up, but no one spoke, except Goggles. He was more dapper than ever, and seemed to have perfectly recuperated from the effects of his long ride of the day before. There was even a little touch of pink in his usually colorless cheeks.

He rose blithely at the sight of Patricia and pulled back her chair. Her loathing of him rose to a physical horror. She could not sit down while the man stood behind the chair.

"Thank you," she said heavily, at last. "Won't you take your chair again?"

"Oh, said Goggles, "of course, if you wish."

She looked across to Ugly Joe and met a scowl in reply.

"What is it?" she asked.

No one would speak, at first. Then she

noted for the first time that Bob Riddle was not there.

"The Whisperer," she gasped. "Last night?"

There came a peculiar, hysterical laugh from Chic Woods, and his little pig-eyes wandered wildly. He tossed a scrap of paper across to her.

"I found that tied on the horn of my saddle this morning. Maybe you can make it out for yourself."

She read:

Gents, I'm gone. Nothing this side of hell can bring me back, so don't try. All I can say is: Chic Woods, your turn comes next, and God help you.

BOB RIDDLE.

She read it again, and this time aloud, and as she finished Chic Woods sprang up, cursing hideously. He was plainly hysterical with fear.

"I start myself," he cried. "Tucker, if you're wise, you start with me. Any man I'll fight, but this damned ghost—"

He turned and fled through the doorway. He was never seen again, it is said, in the mountain-desert. Whether he met the Whisperer and death on his flight, or whether he simply left forever his old haunts, will never be known.

CHAPTER X.

THE MESSAGE TO PATRICIA.

AS for Jack Tucker, he leaned forward heavily on the table and followed the flight of Chic Woods with haunted eyes.

"For me there ain't no use in running," he said slowly. "I can see that plain. I can see why the Whisperer didn't shoot up the rest, but just scared 'em off. He didn't want 'em; he was wanting only me! He *is* Howe, by God, and first he got Mort and now he'll get me! He's cleared out the rest—well, if he gets me, he'll get me in this house—d'ye hear? And nobody 'll make me leave it! I got two guns that shoot straight and clean, and from now on I eat in my room—d'ye hear?"

To his glowering eyes every one who sat at the table, apparently, had that mo-

ment become an enemy. He pushed back his chair, and backed from the room with his hands dropped to the butts of his guns, and through the rest of the day nothing could induce him to leave his room, until the supper-hour. It was Mother Martha who finally brought him down. The day of self-imprisonment had changed him. He came down with a soft and cautious step, like some beast of prey, and he fixed on Ugly Joe, who passed him, a curious stare. Joe said afterward that he thought for an instant that Jack Tucker had lost his mind. At any rate, the gun-fighter went down quite quietly to the dining-room and accepted the chair which Mother Martha pulled back for him, and ate the food she placed before him.

No one but Mother Martha is responsible for the story of what followed in the next few minutes; but the word of Mother Martha, hitherto, has been more easily passed than current gold.

She was much worried about Tucker, she said, for when a man shuts himself up with a worry or a fear he's very apt to lose his mind. It was for that reason that she persuaded him to come down to the dining-room. The man was apparently in a panic of wild, soul-consuming fear. Not the sort of fear that makes men run, but the kind that makes them more dangerous than maniacs.

She tried to encourage him at first, telling him that he was afraid of nothing. She assured him, finally, that the Whisperer had not a reason to injure him any more than the outlaw had already injured the other three gunmen. For the bullets which killed the man Howe had been fired by Mort Lauriston. She had scarcely finished this assurance, when Tucker leaned across the table toward her and said in a ghastly murmur: "You fool! D'you think that I'd of told the truth before Goggles, that damned spy of the Whisperer? Nope; this is the way Howe died. He was standing by his claim and Mort and I rode up, and dismounted. Mort asked him for the makings and while Mort was a rolling a cigarette, I come behind and stabbed Howe in the back. He dropped, but being a big man he died hard. While he was lying

there he told us that he had a brother who'd kill us both—a brother we couldn't get away from. Mort laughed at him, pulled out his gun, and shot him three times through the breast. And that's how he died! But me—I used the knife first—and by the knife—God knows, but I'm afraid—by the knife the Whisperer 'll kill me—cold steel—a sharp edge—"

And then, according to Mother Martha, she heard the most horrible sound of her life, something between a moan and a whisper, like the sound of a wind, far off and yet near. She could not tell where the sound came from—the open door, the window, or the ceiling above them.

It took the shape of a voice—a voiceless voice, which said: "Jack Tucker, you come next!"

Tucker jumped up with a scream and fired two shots through the open door and another through the window. Then he turned and damned Mother Martha, saying this wouldn't have happened if he'd stayed in his room. So he ran, cursing and shuddering, to his room.

Mother Martha had Ugly Joe call in four cow-punchers from the bunk-house and they searched all the vicinity of the house and particularly the sand outside the dining-room window, but not a trace of a man's foot was revealed by their lanterns. It was decided, then, to place a guard over the house throughout the night; the next day they would bring out a posse from Eagles. Four men were posted, one at each corner of the house, and at a distance of about fifty feet, so as to command a full sweep of the surrounding ground. It was a dark night, and for this reason each man had a small fire of mesquite wood. The purpose was not to entrap the Whisperer, but simply to warn him away.

Afterward each of the guards swore that he had remained awake and on the alert, not wishing to fall asleep and have a knife slipped between his ribs by the Whisperer before he awoke. Each of the four was equally vehement in the defense of his individual vigilance. But it was known that all four had worked hard that day, and there were many possibilities that they drowsed beside the fires.

What actually happened, at any rate, was that shortly after midnight the household of Joe Gregory wakened with a scream tingling in their ears. With one accord those inside the house and the guarding cowboys outside, rushed for the room of Jack Tucker. Ugly Joe himself called out a challenge and then was the first to enter, a lantern in one hand and a revolver in the other.

Behind him came his wife, Patricia, and then Goggles, his lean, trembling limbs wrapped in a dressing-gown of linen, stamped with a pattern of gay Japanese flowers. They found Jack Tucker lying face downward in a rapidly widening pool of blood. As they turned him on his back they found that he had been stabbed three times in the breast, each wound enough to cause death. His own jack-knife was still gripped in his hand, showing that he had died fighting, and not, at least, surprised from behind.

There was still a lingering life in him. When he opened his eyes the first thing that they encountered was the horrified face of Patricia leaning close above him.

His lips writhed, parted, and he said: "You—come next—he—told me."

"Told you that she—that the girl—comes next?" cried Goggles, in horror, and he leaned close to the dying man.

Tucker screamed, struck at the face above him, and died.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FOLLY OF WOMEN.

PATRICIA, heart-sick and weak, did not wait to help care for the body of the dead man, but went back to her room. Ugly Joe stopped at her door a moment later to say that he had placed eight men on guard instead of four and that there would be no more trouble that night, at least. The next day he would take her to Eagles.

Nevertheless, she arranged the lamp on the little table at the head of her bed, so that by striking a match she could have a light in a second. The wick of the lamp was turned high, and she made sure that

the supply of oil was high. After that she lay in the dark, certain that she would stay awake until the dawn. But the very violence of the succession of grim pictures which passed across her mind wearied her. Her last consciousness was that of shifting the revolver under her pillow so that it would be easier to grasp.

When she woke again it was with the suffocating consciousness that there was another living, breathing presence in the room. It struck upon her as vividly as a flood of light. She knew that from somewhere in the dark eyes were upon her. She was as conscious of it as a man may be of the sound of his beating heart, though that may be audible to no ear but his own.

At length she made it out—not a shape or any suggestion of a form—it was merely a certain lightening of the utter black near the window and toward the corner of the room. It did not move, but she knew.

And then Patricia was glad, very glad, for there was no fear in her. She was perfectly calm, her hand perfectly steady as she drew out the revolver steadily, softly, from beneath the pillow. She had never been so happy in her life, for she knew that she was meeting a test from which the strongest of brave men might have shrunk. She was about to meet the Whisperer face to face.

It must be understood, in order to follow what Patricia did next, that the little table rose almost a foot above the level of the bed. When the lamp on it was lighted, therefore, a thick shadow fell directly on the bed, though the rest of the room and particularly the ceiling, was well lighted. First she flattened herself on the bed—next she trained the revolver on the gray shadow of the corner. Finally she took a match, scratched it, lighted the lamp—and then gripped the revolver hard, her finger on the trigger. All that could have been seen of her, indeed, would have been the first flash of the light on her hand and wrist as she lighted the lamp. Instantly afterward she was lost in the black shadow which swam across the bed, in waves, because the unsheltered flame from the lamp-wick tossed up and down.

But what Patricia saw in the corner of

the room, leaping suddenly out of the dark, was the figure of a man in gray clothes, wearing a tall, gray sombrero, with a long white mask across his face, and two dark holes where the eyes must be. She saw his hands; there was no weapon in them.

"Stand perfectly still," said Patricia, "I have you covered with a revolver. I shoot well, and at the first move of your hands I'll press the trigger."

Then came the sound which she had heard Mother Martha describe earlier in the evening, but far more terrible than any description—a voiceless voice—something between a whisper and a moan, ghastly, unnerving. At the sound her arm and hand shook—her very brain reeled.

"I have not come to harm you," said the Whisperer, "I have come only to make you give St. Gore his freedom. You have only to speak a word, and I shall be gone again. Say it!"

"You will only leave in the power of the law," said Patricia. "I have you now—I have only to press the trigger—"

"But you cannot," said the Whisperer. "You were cool a moment ago, but now your voice shakes—you dare not raise it so that others in the house might hear—your hand is growing cold—"

"You lie!" said Patricia. "Help! Cousin Joe!"

But even as he had warned her, her voice was only a dry whisper. The hysteria of blind fear seized her at the throat. She knew that in another second he would be complete master—she could feel her strength slipping from her.

He raised an arm and advanced a pace.

"I am waiting," he said. "Be brave—I have not come to harm you—you have only to speak and I disappear—"

Then she fired.

It seemed as if the Whisperer sat down, shoved abruptly toward a chair; then he collapsed along the floor.

She leaped from the bed; in the distance she heard many voices—shouts, running steps. Over the prostrate figure she leaned, tore away the mask, and looked into the calm, steady eyes of Goggles!

She could not conceive it at first; it was like the miracle which surpasses belief.

The revolver clicked on the floor, fallen from her nerveless hand.

"You—you—you!" she could only stammer.

"I," said Goggles faintly, and smiled up at her. "The game's up, but it was jolly while it lasted!"

There came a banging at her door—the shout of Ugly Joe. She leaned, picked up the revolver, and ran to the door, which she set a little ajar and peeked out.

"I can't let you in—I'm undressed; I was handling the revolver—and it went off—I'm not the least hurt."

"Thank God!" groaned Ugly Joe, and voices behind him echoed heavily: "Thank God!"

She closed the door, barred it again, and ran to Goggles. He had struggled to a half sitting posture, and as she leaned over him his eyes widened with a sort of fascinated horror.

"You don't understand," said he. "Open the door; call them in. I am the Whisperer!"

"Hush!" she said. "Little fool, be still!"

She leaned and picked him up. He was hardly heavier than she, and she bore his weight without great difficulty. With her strong young arms she felt the frailty of the outlaw whom the whole mountain-desert had feared. For an instant his head lay helpless against her bare shoulder; the nervous right hand which had dealt death once that night hung limply down. She felt the quick, shuddering intake of his breath against her throat.

Only an instant, and then she laid him on her bed. There she tore open his shirt.

"The left side," said he. "You meant well, but the bullet must have glanced—on the ribs. A fraction of an inch closer in, and—"

He set his teeth with a light click and closed his eyes against the pain.

Then she found the wound. It was bleeding profusely, but she saw at a glance that it was not serious. It had glanced, apparently, from a rib, as he suggested, and had furrowed through the flesh along his side. A grisly painful wound, but not mortal. She ran to her suit-case, ripped a linen shirt

into narrow strips, ran back, and made the pack and bandage.

She had studied a little of first-aid, though she had never before had occasion to make use of it.

He helped her as well as he could, rolling from side to side, though the pain sent the sweat out upon his forehead. When she was finished he leaned heavily back on the pillows.

His face was almost as white as the bedding, and the hand which lay across his breast was marvelously fragile, almost transparent.

"In a moment," he said, "I'll be able to go."

He opened his eyes.

"But you," he said, "I don't understand—why—"

"I don't understand either," she said, "I don't want to understand—I don't want to think—except to get you safe and well again."

"And you won't turn me in—the Whisperer? Think of the name of it? Think of the fame of it! Think of what it would mean to you!"

"Do you really expect me to?" she asked.

"I don't know. I thought I knew—a good many things—about you—and other women—but I guess I've been a fool—a great fool. Most men are—I guess—about women."

"And I, too," she answered. "I've been a great fool, but I think I've found myself in time."

And for the conclusion of the story we may as well take the version of Ugly Joe Gregory, as he told it many times in the saloons of Eagles, for every stranger had to hear the story of the last appearance of the Whisperer, and Ugly Joe had the only authentic version.

In the conclusion he always said:

"No, I never seen him, but my wife heard his whisper.

"And while I'm spreading on the talk I might's well tell you something else damn near as queer as the things the Whisperer done them three days.

"There was a dude out here—a no-account damned dude we called Goggles from his funny glasses. Most of the boys around here remember him.

"He was a sort of go-between for the Whisperer. And he was the one, maybe, that brought all the hell to poor Tucker and the rest of 'em. He was at the house, you know.

"Well, the dude must of been pretty badly shook up by the bad way Tucker died, because the next day he come down with a fever and stayed in bed off and on about three weeks.

"The funny part was that this girl—this Pat I been telling you about—got a pile interested in the dude when he was sick. You couldn't pry her away from his bed. Women are queer that way, but she was the queerest of the lot.

"Day and night she stuck by him like she was his sister. Wouldn't even let Mother Martha, that knew a pile more about nursing than she ever did, help her once in a while.

"Martha, she pretended to be pretty wise about something, but it was all Indian to me. But in the end, well, sir, the dude went back to Eagles, and Pat went with him. And right over there in Widow Morgan's boarding-house, in the front parlor down-stairs, they was married.

"Can you beat that? You can't. I'll bet you can't!

"I s'pose she got so used to taking care of the poor dude that she couldn't get along without him. That's the way Martha explained it. Martha was that way herself at one time.

"She took care of a calf that got cut bad in barb wire once, and afterward she wouldn't never let me sell that calf or market him, but just kept him hangin' around useless till he got to be a steer and died of old age. Yep, women are sure fools about some things.

"There was one funnier thing, too, that come out after Pat married that gent. It seemed that Vincent St. Gore was only part of his name.

"The whole of his name was Vincent St. Gore Howe."

(The end.)

The Metal Monster

by A. Merritt

Author of "The Moon Pool," "The Conquest of the Moon Pool," etc.

(In collaboration with Dr. Walter T. Goodwin, Ph.D., I. A. S., F. R. G. S., etc.)

LIKE Mr. Merritt's narrative of "The Moon Pool" (published in *All-Story Weekly*, June 22, 1918), and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" (*All-Story Weekly*, February 15 to March 22, 1919), "The Metal Monster" is published with the consent and authority of the International Association of Science. After the expeditions described in the earlier narratives, Dr. Walter T. Goodwin was placed at the head of a special bureau of the association and supplied with unlimited means to prosecute his investigations. Upon his recent return from Central Asia he gave Mr. Merritt the manuscript of his report, to be prepared for popular presentation. In its popularized form it is presented herewith.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHILE traveling in the mountains of Turkestan with Chiu-Ming, a Chinese, Dr. Goodwin met Dick Drake, an American engineer. In a valley they saw a colossal imprint crushed into the stone with unthinkable force—a curved heel with four claws, each twenty feet long, extending from it. Next day, while traveling an ancient road that passed through a hollow, they were almost overcome by an unseen force that sapped their strength. Winning through they met an American girl, Ruth Ventnor, daughter of a scientist, and her brother Mart. From them they learned that one night two men, the first humans they had seen for months—had come close to their fire and discussed Ruth with exceeding frankness—in archaic Persian.

Ruth showed Dr. Goodwin and Dick a number of small metal objects, that formed geometrical designs that moved, seemingly with intelligence, and formed a bridge. Metal—with a brain!

Attacked by the pursuing Persians the men were about to sell their lives as dearly as possible when they saw standing in a fissure in the mountain the figure of a woman. At her command hundreds of the metal objects—the "Metal Things"—formed themselves into a giant that struck out and destroyed the attackers. The woman, in ancient Persian, told them that she was "Norhala." She was beautiful—but not entirely human. At her command they followed her into the fissure—which proved to be a passage hewed by human hands—and crossed a chasm on a bridge formed by the "Metal Things," who then made themselves into a serpent and followed! Later, at Norhala's order, they mounted platforms formed by the "Metal Things" and were swept away through the mists and through an opening in the mountain's wall.

CHAPTER XV.

THE THING THAT FOLLOWED.

UPON that threshold the mists foamed like breaking billows; ceased abruptly to be. Keeping exactly the distance I had noted when our gaze had risen above the fog, glided the block that bore

Ruth and Norhala. In the strange light of the place into which we had emerged—and whether that place was cañon, corridor, or tunnel I could not then determine—it stood out sharply, with stereoscopic vividness.

One arm of Norhala held Ruth—and in her attitude I sensed a shielding intent,

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guardianship—the first really human impulse this shape of mystery and beauty had revealed. There was something in the sight that was like the touch of an awakening hand in nightmare, profoundly reassuring, dulling the edge of my apprehension.

In front of them swept score upon score of her familiars—no longer dully lustrous, but shining as though cut from blue and polished steel. They—marched—in ordered rows, globes and cubes and pyramids; moving sedately now as units.

I looked behind me; out of the spume boiling at the portal, were pouring other scores of the Metal Things, darting through like divers through a wave! And as they drew into our wake, swam into the light, their dim lustre vanished like a film; their surfaces grew almost radiant.

Whence came the light that set them gleaming? Our pace had slackened—I looked about me. The walls of the cleft or tunnel were perpendicular, smooth and shining with a cold, metallic, greenish glow.

Between the walls, like the rhythmic flashing of fire-flies, pulsed soft and fugitive glimmerings that carried a sense of the infinitely minute—of electrons, it came to me, rather than atoms. Their irradiance was greenish, like the walls; but I was certain that these corpuscles did not come from them.

They blinked and faded like motes within a shifting sunbeam; or, to use a more scientific comparison, like colloids within the illuminated field of the ultra-microscope; and like these latter it was as though the eye took in not the minute particles themselves but the radiation from them.

Save for these gleamings the light of the place, although crepuscular, was crystalline clear. High above us—five hundred, a thousand feet—the walls merged into a haze of clouded beryl.

Rock certainly the cliffs were—but rock cut and planed, smoothed and polished and plated!

Yes, that was it—plated! Plated with some metallic substance that was itself a reservoir of luminosity and from which, it came to me, pulsed the force that lighted the winking ions. But who could have done such a thing? For what purpose? How?

I became conscious of a thickening, an intensification of the magnetic flux enmeshing us; acutely, poignantly conscious of a sharp accentuation of every hint, every suggestion of contact with unknown, unhuman power, knowledge and—science! And the meticulousness, the perfection of these smoothed cliffs struck over my nerves as no rasp could, stirring a vague resentment, an irritated desire for human inharmonies, human disorder.

Absorbed in my examination I had forgotten those who must share with me my doubts and dangers. I felt a grip on my arm; heard Drake muttering in my ear.

"If we get close enough and I can get my feet loose from this damned thing I'll jump!"

"What?" I gasped, blankly, startled out of my preoccupation. "Jump where?"

I followed his pointing finger. We were rapidly closing upon the other cube; it was now a scant twenty paces ahead; it seemed to be stopping. Ventnor was leaning forward, quivering with eagerness.

"Ruth!" he called. "Ruth—are you all right?"

Slowly she turned to us—my heart gave a great leap, then seemed to stop. For her sweet face was touched with that same unearthly tranquility which was Norhala's; in her brown eyes was a shadow of that passionless spirit brooding in Norhala's own and her voice as she answered held within it more than echo of Norhala's faint, far-off golden chiming!

"Yes," she sighed; "yes, Martin—have no fear for me—"

And turned from us, gazing forward once more with the woman and as silent as she.

I glanced covertly at Ventnor, at Drake—had I imagined, or had they too seen? Then I knew they had—for Ventnor's face was white to the lips, fear in his eyes; and Drake's jaw was set, his teeth clenched, his eyes blazing with anger.

"What's she doing to Ruth—did you see that look—" he gritted, half inarticulately.

"Ruth!" There was anguish in Ventnor's cry.

She did not turn; it was as though she had not heard him.

The cubes were now not five yards apart.

Drake gathered himself; strained to loosen his feet from the shining surface, making ready to leap when they should draw close enough. His great chest swelled with his effort, the muscles of his neck knotted, sweat streamed down his face.

"No use," he gasped, "no use, Goodwin. It's like trying to lift yourself by your boot-straps—like a fly stuck in molasses!"

"Ruth!" cried Vantor again.

As though it had been a signal the block so near darted forward, resuming the distance it had formerly maintained between us. The vanguard of the Metal Things began to race. With an incredible speed they fled into, were lost in an instant within, the luminous distances.

The cube that bore woman and girl accelerated its own motion; flew faster and fasted onward. And as swiftly our own followed it. The lustrous walls flowed by, dizzyingly.

There was a little wailing chorus behind us. We looked—looked and shrank together.

Down upon us was rushing a monstrous wave, an avalanche, of the Metal Things! Fifty feet in air was its crest—and even in that moment of stark panic I noted with what mathematical regularity the spikes of the pyramids tipped it and with what awesome orderliness cube and sphere were placed.

Half across the cleft it stretched—not so much wave or avalanche as curtain, two hundred feet wide and a fourth of that as high. A metallic, living curtain, rushing down upon us!

Closer it came and closer—now its rigid, shining, knobbed and spiked front was almost on us. Out of it stared the myriads of steady—mocking—eyes. We cowered, waiting for it to break over us, crush us.

A movement began in it! Ball and square and angle writhed and spun and threaded. Its middle began to contract—as if an unseen cable were drawing in its sides. There was an infinitely rapid shifting—

The curtain was gone!

In its place, gliding after us, was a colossal Thing, gigantic mate to the Smiting Thing which had shattered the armored

men; yet not of any of its shifting shapes and to it in size as that had been to the Lilliputian of the ruins.

Difficult—difficult beyond thought is it to picture in words that prodigy following us; built though it was from most familiar forms—of nothing but globes and blocks and four-sided wedges, shapes commonplace and normal. In that commonplaceness lies the very heart of my difficulty; for from the thinking, conscious combination of those curves and planes was born not a fourth dimension, but a fifth and sixth as well; yes, and more.

It was their basic simplicity that pointed the lance of inexplicable terror! The obvious transformed into the unfathomable!

The height of fifty tall men it rose; towering upon four slender, stiltlike legs made up of alternate spiked six-foot block and ball. These spidery legs supported a huge cylindrical body, from the top of which a quintet of the girdered cubes, each, I estimated, twenty feet long, abruptly thrust themselves.

They radiated like a five-pointed star and over their length, swarming out of the body like bees from a hive, flashed scores of spheres and smaller blocks. With the same vertiginous rapidity that marked all the Protean changes of the Things while in combination, these clustered at the ends of the girders, shifted—at each end was now a monstrous thirty-foot wheel, their hubs the globular clusters, their spokes the cubes and their rims great, tetrahedron-tipped spheres!

And all these changes had been made while still it maintained its steady, gliding pace close behind us!

"Doc." Drake's voice was defiant. "Do you suppose this lad is entertaining us or just amusing itself?"

"It's hardly a laughing matter, Drake," I answered, sternly—shocked by his flippancy. "And not a time for levity," I added even more tartly, for suddenly the wheeling crests of the Following Thing had doubled themselves, the abrupt action pulling every one of my nerves taut as a bowstring. His delighted grin revealed to me not only the triteness but the total inadequacy of my rebuke.

"*I'll* say it's not!" he exclaimed. "You put it in a nut-shell, Doc. You certainly have sized up the situation with an amazing and original brevity."

I flushed at the broad sarcasm.

"And at that you're dead wrong," he went on. "Now *is* the time for the immortal spirit of man to tap from itself the immortal laughter of the Gods who made him," he intoned; drolly. "The yeast of laughter that they dropped into the human brew when they made us, Doc. What the hell—if we don't laugh at it we're lost, aren't we? Stuck here in this damnable magnetic fly-paper—with *this* after us—Lord knows what's ahead of us."

"Holy saints! If I only had a barrel of the old familiar brew here I'd sit on it and twine vine-leaves in my hair and sing to that bird to show it just how much better than itself I am. And one thing I tell you—I'm done with being afraid. Hell! All they can do is kill us!"

"Don't think my fear is for myself, Drake." There was a stir of anger in Ventnor's words. "And it's not death I fear for Ruth. It's what I saw resting on her face. It's what that witch is doing to her—*soul!*"

"I'm sorry, Ventnor," the mockery fled from Drake's eyes, he thrust out an impetuous hand. "I didn't mean anybody was really *afraid*—just sort of—well, worried. And we can do nothing by worrying—don't you see that it will only weaken us, Ventnor?"

"I know," Ventnor nodded. "I know—still—" He scanned the hovering shape, and I saw his trouble submerged visibly in the wave of irresistible scientific absorption called forth by its amazing transformations; in my own contemplation of them forgot myself our peril.

For the five enormous wheels that crowned the top of the Thing were spinning; they revolved madly upon their own axes, circled slowly around the *neck*—of the Shape itself. And as they spun each wheel tipped over toward us, hung over us, staring down at us with the uncountable star points even as the Little Thing of the dragoned chamber had stared up at me—and with the same curiosity! Like

little clouds of fireflies the winking corpuscles of light hovered around them.

"If there were enough of them they could walk across the oceans," mused Drake. As though it had heard him and understood the Thing lifted gently one of its four stilts, extended it leisurely over us, undulated it, then placed it deliberately and daintily a few yards ahead and directly in our path.

There had been something hideously spiderlike in that movement! As it thrust over us, not three yards over our heads, I saw plainly the globes and cubes bending and flexing like a monstrous spider's leg of a thousand joints!

"Synchronism raised to the highest power," muttered Ventnor. "Perfect, immediate realization and manipulation of stresses, contacts, leverages. An unimaginable cooperation—a mass consciousness undreamed! Man—man, you pygmy!" His voice shook.

"Can you see how it moves?" I asked. "The ends of the supports seem to me to be touching the ground—but their progress, as well as that of what we are on, is absolutely smooth and effortless."

"I don't think they quite touch," observed Drake. "They seem to float just a little over the surface. Utilization of magnetism, manipulation of attracting and repelling currents without a doubt."

"But how?" I gasped. "How?"

He shrugged, pointed upward.

"How does it do that?" he asked.

The supporting stilts were bending, curving. I saw their three formative factors shifting and readjusting themselves, obeying the commands from the synthesis of its manifold brains!

Lower came the huge body and lower, threatening to crush us!

Abruptly two of the legs drew up toward the trunk, joined ends, threw themselves loose from the *hips*—and became a vast and sparkling ring, circling it so swiftly that it appeared to be a wide and solid band of polished steel. The five wheels about the top were now only a blur.

The legs began a rapid buckling and straightening, like the flexing of immense springs. There came the curious wailing

sounds. Up rose the five wheels, merged even as they lifted into one enormous circlet, spun, an unimaginably huge sparkling Catherine wheel, high up in the green haze—vanished within it!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DRUMS OF THUNDER.

GROTESQUELY, *horribly*, did the Thing now appear to be headless—a decapitated shape hovering over us. From on high came again the wailings.

Into view whirled the colossal ring, yards in advance of us. Down it swept, was drawn back like a leaf in a draft, swerved and clicked into place on the girdled, monstrous body!

"Good God!" Drake's voice, despite his boast, was shaking.

"Man—man the pygmy!" muttered Ventnor, eyes burning.

Once more we heard the wailings. The Following Thing trembled, ran together, melted—was gone, dissolved into a host of spheres and blocks and pyramids that followed in our wake like a quiet, reaching wave—gently and sedately!

Now I noted that we had swept over toward the right wall of the cleft; were gliding over a broad ledge. This ledge was, I judged, all of a hundred feet in width. From it the floor of the place was dropping rapidly.

The opposite precipices were slowly drawing closer. After us flowed the flanking host.

Steadily our ledge arose, the floor of the cañon dropped. Now we were twenty feet above it, now thirty. And the character of the cliffs was changing. Veins of quartz shone under the metallic plating like cut crystal, like cloudy opals; here was a splash of vermillion, there a patch of amber; bands of pallid ochre stained it.

Abruptly my gaze was caught by a line of inky-blackness in the exact center of the falling floor. So black was it that at first glance I took it for a vein of jetty lignite.

It widened; I saw that it was a crack, a fissure; now it was a yard in width,

now three; blackness seemed to well up within it, blackness that was the very essence of the depths. Steadily the ebon rift expanded; spread suddenly wide open in two sharp-edged, flying wedges—

Earth had dropped away. At our side a gulf had opened, an abyss, striking down depth upon depth; profound; immeasurable!

We were human atoms, riding upon a steed of sorcery and racing along a split rampart of infinite space!

I looked behind—scores of the cubes were darting from the metal host trailing us; in a long column of twos they flashed by, raced ahead. Far before us a gloom began to grow; deepened until we were rushing into blackest night.

Through the murk stabbed a long lance of pale blue phosphorescence. It unrolled like a ribbon of wan flame, flicked like a serpent's tongue—held steady. I felt the Thing beneath us leap forward; its velocity grew prodigious; the wind beat upon us with hurricane force.

I shielded my eyes with my hands, peered through the chinks of my fingers. Ranged directly in our path was a barricade of the cubes and upon them we were racing like a flying battering-ram. Involuntarily I closed my eyes against the annihilating impact that seemed inevitable!

"God!" I heard Ventnor mutter; felt the Thing on which we rode lifting; unclosed my lids.

We were *soaring* at a long angle straight to the top of the barrier; were upon it, and still with that awful speed unchecked were hurtling through the blackness over the shaft of phosphorescence, the ribbon of pale light that I had watched pierce it and knew now was but another span of the cubes that but a little before had fled past us! Beneath the span, on each side of it, I sensed the illimitable void!

We were over; rushing along in darkness. I became conscious of a mighty tumult, a vast crashing and roaring, reverberations that might have come from the smithies of Vulcan in the deepest hidden caverns of Earth. The clangor waxed, beat about us with tremendous wings of sound!

Far away was a dim glowing, as of rising

sun through heavy mists of dawn. The mists faded—miles away gleamed what at first glimpse seemed indeed to be the rising sun; a gigantic orb, whose lower limb just touched, was sharply, horizontally cut by the blackness, as though at its base that blackness was frozen.

The sun? Reason returned to me; told me this globe could not be *that*.

What was it then? Ra-Harmachis, of the Egyptians, stripped of his wings, exiled and growing old in the corridors of the Dead? Or that mocking luminary, the cold phantom of the God of light and warmth which the old Norsemen believed was set in their frozen hell to torment the damned?

I thrust aside the fantasies, impatiently. But sun or no sun, light streamed from this orb, light in multicolored, lanced rays, banishing the blackness through which we had been flying!

Closer we came and closer; lighter it grew about us, and by the growing light I saw that still beside us ran the abyss. And ever louder, more thunderous, became the clamor.

At the foot of the radiant disk I glimpsed a luminous pool. Into it, out of the depths, protruded a tremendous rectangular tongue, gleaming like gray steel. On the tongue an inky shape appeared; it lifted itself from the abyss, rushed upon the disk and took form.

Like a gigantic spider it was, squat and horned, inconceivably monstrous, amorphous. For an instant it was silhouetted against the shining sphere, poised itself—and vanished through it!

Now, not far ahead, silhouetted as had been the spider shape, blackened into sight a cube and on it Ruth and Norhala! It seemed to hover, to wait.

"It's a door, an opening!" Drake's shout beat thinly in my ears against the hurricane of sound.

What I had thought an orb was indeed a gateway, a portal; and gigantic. A mile away form it as we were, it came to me that it must be all of half that in diameter.

The light streamed *through* it, the flaming colors, the lightning glare, the drifting shadows were all *beyond* it. The suggestion of sphere had been an illusion, born of

the darkness in which we were moving and its own luminescence.

And I saw that the steel tongue was a ramp, a slide, dropping down into the gulf!

Norhala raised her hand high above her head. Up from the darkness flew an incredible shape—like a monstrous, armored, flat-backed crab; angled spikes protruded from it; its huge body was spangled with darting, greenish flames.

It swept beneath us and by. On its back were multitudinous breasts from which issued blinding flashes—sapphire blue, emerald, green, sun-yellow. It hung poised as had that other nightmare shape, standing out jet-black and colossal, rearing upon columnar legs, whose outlines were those of alternate enormous angled arrow-points and lunettes. Swiftly its form shifted; an instant it hovered, half disintegrate.

Then I saw spinning spheres and darting cubes and pyramids click into new positions. The front and side legs lengthened, the back legs shortened, fitting themselves plainly to what must be a varying angle of descent beyond.

And it was no chimera, no kraken of the abyss; It was a *car* made of the Metal Things. I caught again the flashes—knew that they were jewels or heaps of shining ores carried by the conscious machine.

It vanished. In its place hung poised the cube that bore the enigmatic woman and Ruth. Then they were gone and we stood where but an instant before they had been.

We were high above an ocean of living light—a sea of incandescent splendors that stretched mile upon uncounted mile away and whose incredible waves streamed thousands of feet in air, flew in gigantic banners, in tremendous streamers, in coruscating clouds of varicolored flame—as though torn by the talons of a mighty wind! And the place was one vast caldron of tempests; a titanic womb of the lightings!

My dazzled sight cleared, glare and blaze and searing incandescence took form, became ordered. Within the sea of light I glimpsed shapes cyclopean, unnameable.

They moved slowly, with an awesome deliberateness. They shone darkly within the flame-woven depths. From them came the volleys of the lightnings!

Score upon score of them they were—huge, enigmatic. Their flaming levins threaded the shimmering veils, patterned them, as though they were the flying robes of the very spirit of fire!

And the tumult was as ten thousand Thors smiting with hammers against the enemies of Odin! As a forge upon whose shouting anvils were shaped a new world!

A new world? A metal world! The thought spun through my mazed brain, was gone—and not until long after did I remember it! For abruptly all that clamor died; the lightnings ceased; all the flitting radiances paled and the sea of flaming splendors grew thin as moving mists. The colossal, storming shapes dulled with them, seemed to darken into the murk.

Through the fast-waning light and far, far away—miles it seemed on high and many, many miles in length—a broad band of fluorescent amethyst shone. From it dropped curtains, shimmering, nebulous, scintillant as the marching folds of the aurora; they poured, cascaded, from the amethystine band.

Huge and purple-black against their opalescence bulked what at first I thought a mountain, so like was it to one of those fantastic buttes of our desert Southwest when their castellated tops are silhouetted against the setting sun; knew instantly that this was but subconscious striving to translate into terms of reality the incredible.

It was a—city!

A city fully five thousand feet high and crowned with countless spires and turrets, titanic arches, stupendous domes! It was as though the man-made cliffs of lower New York were raised scores of times their height, stretched a score of times their length; as though Titans ten times the bulk of man had built them. And weirdly enough did it suggest those same towering masses of masonry when one watching from Brooklyn Bridge sees them blacken against the twilight skies.

The pit darkened as though night were filtering down into it; the vast, purple-shadowed walls of the city sparkled out with countless lights! From the crowning arches and turrets leaped broad filaments of flame, flashing, electric.

Was it my straining eyes, the play of light and shadow—or were those high-flung excrescences shifting, changing shape? Again that icy hand stretched out of the unknown, stilled my heart. For they *were* shifting—arches and domes, turrets and spires; were melting, reappearing; in ferment; like the lightning-threaded, rolling edges of the thunder-cloud!

I wrenched my gaze away; saw that our platform had come to rest upon a broad and silvery ledge close to the curving frame of the portal and not a yard from where upon her block stood Norhala, arm clasped about the rigid form of Ruth. I heard a sigh from Ventnor, an exclamation from Drake.

Before one of us could find tongue to cry out to Ruth, the cube glided to the edge of the shelf, dipped out of sight.

That upon which we rode trembled and sped after it.

There came a sickening sense of falling; we lurched against each other; for the first time the pony whinnied, fearfully. Then with an awful, an incredible speed we were flying down a wide, a glistening, a steeply angled ramp; into the pit, straight toward the half-hidden, soaring and precipitous escarpments flashing afar.

Far ahead raced the Thing on which stood woman and maid. Their tresses streamed behind them, mingled, silken web of brown and shining veil of red gold; little clouds of sparkling corpuscles threaded them, like flitting swarms of fireflies; their bodies were nimbused with tiny, flickering tongues of lavender flame!

About us, above us, began again to rumble the countless drums of the thunder!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PORTAL OF FLAME.

IT was as though we were upon a meteor hurtling through space. The split air shrieked and shrilled, a keening barrier against the avalanche of the thunder. The blast bent us far back on thighs held rigid by the magnetic grip.

The pony spread its legs, dropped its head; thinly through the hurricane roar-

ing its screaming pierced, that agonizing, terrible lamentation which is of the horse and the horse alone when the limit of its endurance is reached. I watched Ventnor crouch lower and lower, eyes shielded behind arms folded over his brows, straining for glimpse of Ruth; saw Drake crouching beside him, bracing him, supporting him, bent against the tempest of our passing even as he.

Our line of flight became less abrupt, but the speed increased, the wind-pressure became insupportable. I twisted, dropped upon my right arm, thrust my head against my shoulder, stared backward. When first I had looked upon the place I had sensed its immensity; now I began to realize how vast it must really be—for already the portal through which we had come glimmered far away on high, shrunk to a hoop of incandescent brass and was dwindling fast.

Nor was it a cavern; staring upward I saw the stars, traced with deep relief the familiar Northern constellations. Pit it might be, wide and deep as that into which from the ramparts of Paradise the legend tells were hurled Lucifer and his armies—but whatever terror, whatever ordeals were before us, we would not have to face them buried deep within earth. There was a curious comfort in the thought!

Suddenly stars and sky were blotted out. We had plunged beneath the surface of that radiant sea!

Lying in the position in which I was, I was sensible of a diminution of the cyclonic force; the blast streamed up and over the front of the cube. To me drifted only the wailings of our flight and the whimpering terror of the pony.

I turned my head, cautiously. Upon the very edge of the flying blocks squatted Drake and Ventnor, grotesquely froglike. I crawled toward them—crawled, literally, like a caterpillar; for wherever my body touched the surface of the cubes the attracting force held it, allowed a creeping movement only, surface sliding upon surface—and weirdly enough like a human measuring-worm I looped myself over to them.

As my bare palms clung to the Things I realized with finality that whatever their activation, their life, they *were* metal!

There was no mistaking the testimony of touch. Metal they were, with a hint upon contact of highly polished platinum, or at the least of a metal as finely grained as it.

Also they had temperature, a curiously pleasant warmth—the surfaces were, I judged, around ninety-five degrees Fahrenheit. I looked deep down into the little sparkling points that were, I knew, organs of sight; they were like the points of contact of innumerable intersecting crystal planes. They held strangest paradoxical suggestion of being close to the surface and still infinite distances away.

And they were like—what *was* it they were like?—it came to me with a distinct shock.

They were like the galaxies of little aureate and sapphire stars in the clear gray heavens of Norhala's eyes!

I crept beside Drake, struck him with my head. He looked down upon me, curiously "Can't move," I shouted. "Can't lift my hands! Stuck fast—like a fly—just as you said."

"Drag 'em over your knees," he cried, bending to me. "It slides 'em out of the attraction."

Acting as he had suggested I found to my astonishment I could slip my hands free; I caught his belt, tried to lift myself by it.

"No use, Doc," the old grin lightened for a moment his tense young face, "you'll have to keep praying till the power's turned off. Nothing here you can slide your knees on."

I nodded, waddling close to his side; then sank back on my haunches to relieve the strain upon aching leg-muscles.

"Can you see them ahead, Goodwin—Ruth and the woman?" Ventnor turned his anxious eyes toward me.

I peered into the glimmering murk; shook my head. I could see nothing. It was, indeed, as though the clustered cubes sped within a bubble of the now wanly glistening vapors; or rather as though in our passage—as a projectile does in air—we piled before us a thick wave of the mists which streaming along each side, closing in behind, obscured all that lay around.

Yet I had, persistently, the feeling that

beyond these shroudings was vast and ordered movement; marchings and counter-marchings of hosts greater even than those Golden Hordes of Genghis which ages ago had washed about the outer bases of the very peaks that hid this ensorcelled place. Came, too, flitting shadowings of huge shapes, unnameable, moving swiftly beside our way; gleamings that thrust themselves through the veils like wheeling javelins of flame.

And always, always, everywhere that constant movement, rhythmic, terrifying—like myriads of feet of creatures of an unseen, stranger world marking time just outside the threshold of our own! Preparing, drilling there in some wide vestibule of space between the known and the unknown, alert and menacing—*poised* for the signal, which would send them pouring over it!

Once again I seemed to stand upon the brink of an abyss of incredible revelation, striving helplessly, struggling for realization—and so struggling became aware that our speed was swiftly slackening, the roaring blast dying down, the veils before us thinning.

They cleared away. I saw Drake and Ventnor straighten up rigidly; raised myself to my own aching knees, gazing as did they with mazed, incredulous eyes!

We were at one end of a vortex, a funneling within the radiant vapors; a funnel whose further end a mile ahead broadened out into a huge circle, its mistily outlined edges impinging upon the towering scarp of the—city. It was as though before us lay, upon its side, a cone of crystalline clear air against whose curved sides some radiant medium, heavier than air, lighter than water, pressed.

The top arc of its prostrate base reached a thousand feet or more up the precipitous wall; above it all was hidden in sparkling nebulosities that were like still clouds of greenly, glimmering fireflies. Back from the curving sides of this cone, above it and below it, the pressing luminosities stretched, into, it seemed, infinite distances.

Through them, suddenly, thousands of bright beams began to dart, to dance, weaving and interweaving, shooting hither and yon—like myriads of great searchlights in

a phosphorescent sea fog, like countless lances of the aurora thrusting through its own iridescent veils! And in the play of these beams was something appallingly ordered, appallingly rhythmic.

It was—how can I describe it?—*purposeful*; purposeful as the geometric shiftings of the Little Things of the ruins, of the summoning song of Norhala, of the Protean changes of the Smiting Shape and the Following Thing; and like all of these it was as laden with that baffling certainty of hidden meanings, of messages that the brain recognized as such yet knew it never could read.

The rays seemed to spring upward from the earth. Now they were like countless lances of light borne by marching armies of Titans; now they crossed and angled and flew as though they were clouds of javelins hurled by battling swarms of the Genii of Light; and now they stood upright while through them, thrusting them aside, bending them passed vast, vague shapes like mountains forming and dissolving; like darkening monsters of some world of light pushing through thick forests of slender, high-reaching trees of cold flame; shifting shadows of monstrous chimeræ slipping through jungles of bamboo with trunks of diamond fire; phantasmal leviathans swimming through brakes of giant reeds of radiance rising from the sparkling ooze of a sea of star shine!

Whence came the force, the mechanism that produced this cone of clarity, this *not* searchlight, but unlight in the midst of light? Not from behind, that was certain—for turning I saw that behind us the mist was as thick. I turned again—it came to me, why I knew not, yet with an absolute certainty, that the energy, the force emanated from the distant wall itself! The funnel, the cone, did not expand from where we stood, now motionless. It *began* at the wall and *focused* upon us!

But how? In the name of all science—how?

Within the great circle the surface of the wall was smooth, utterly blank; and it was windowless, apertureless; upon it was no trace of those flitting lights we had seen before we had plunged down toward the

radiant sea. It shone with a pale blue phosphorescence that was the exact tone of the Nameless Things under the sheen of the Plated Cañon and it was featureless, smooth, a blind cliff of polished, blue metal—and that was all!

"Ruth!" groaned Ventnor. "Ruth! Where is she?"

Aghast at my mental withdrawal from him, angry at myself for my callousness, awkwardly I tried to crawl over to him, to touch him, comfort him as well as I might.

And then, as though his cry had been a signal, the great cone began to move. Slowly the circled base slipped down the shimmering facades; down, steadily down; I realized that we had paused at the edge of some steep declivity, for the bottom of the cone was now at a decided angle while the upper edge of the circle had dropped a full two hundred feet below where it had rested—and still it fell.

There came a gasp of relief from Ventnor, a sigh from Drake while, from my own heart, a weight rolled. Not ten yards ahead of us and still deep within the luminosity had appeared the unearthly regal head of Norhala, the lovely head of Ruth. The two rose out of the glow like swimmers floating from the depths. Now they were clear before us, and now we could see the surface of the cube on which they rode.

But neither turned to us; each stared straightly, motionless along the axis of the sinking cone, the woman's right arm holding Ruth close to her side!

"Good God!" Drake's hand caught my shoulder in a grip that hurt—nor did he need to point toward that which had wrung the exclamation from him. The funnel had broken from its slow falling; it had made one swift, startling drop and had come to rest. Its recumbent side was now flattened into a triangular plane, widening from the narrow tip in which we stood to all of five hundred feet where its base rested against the blue wall, and falling at a full thirty-degree pitch.

The misty-edged circle had become an oval, a flattened ellipse another five hundred feet high and three times that in length. And in its exact center, shining

forth as though it opened into a place of pale azure incandescence was a Cyclopean portal, rectangular, to which the huge megalithic gateway of that mysterious race whose fanes were time-worn before the Incas learned to build upon them were but doorways for pygmies!

But it was not that prodigious gate into this unimaginable place that drove the blood from our cheeks, checked the heart-beat and sent the hair prickling on our scalps; no. It was that on each side of it, in the apparently solid face of the gleaming, metallic cliffs, a slit was opening.

They began as thin lines a hundred yards in height through which the intense light seemed to hiss; quickly they opened—widening like monstrous cat pupils until at last, their widening ceasing, they glared forth, the blue incandescence gushing from them like molten steel from an opened sluice! And, wide open, weirdly, awesomely did they retain that feline suggestion—as though they were the blazing eyes of some colossal tigress Sphinx!

Deep within them I sensed a movement. Swam there—scores of towering shapes; swam within and glided out of them—score upon score of obelisked forms, each reflecting that vivid light as though they themselves were incandescent! Around their crests spun wide and flaming coronets.

They rushed forth, wheeling, whirling like dervishes, driven like leaves in a whirlwind. Out they swirled from the cat's eyes of the glimmering wall, these dervish obelisks crowded with spinning fires and vanished in the mists! Instantly, with their going the eyes contracted; were but slits; were gone! And before us within the oval was only the waiting portal!

The leading block leaped forward; rushed down the steep toward the portal. As abruptly those that bore us followed. Again under that strain of projectile flight we clutched each other; the pony screamed its terror. The metal cliff rushed to meet us like a thunder cloud of steel; the portal raced upon us—a square mouth of cold blue flame!

And into it we swept; were devoured by it! Light in a blinding, intolerable flood

beat about us, blackening the sight with agony! We pressed, the three of us, against the side of the pony, burying our faces in its shaggy coat, striving to hide our eyes from the radiance which, strain closely as we might, seemed to pierce through the body of the little beast, through our own heads, searing the sight!

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WITCH! GIVE BACK MY SISTER."

HOW long we were within that glare I do not know; it seemed unending hours; it was of course only minutes—seconds, perhaps. After aeons of pain, I was sensible of a permeating shadow, a darkness gentle and healing.

I raised my head, opened my eyes. We were moving tranquilly, slowly—with a curious suggestion of *homing* leisureliness—through a soft, blue shimmering *darkness*! It was as though we were drifting within some high borderland of light; a region in which that rapid vibration we call the violet was mingled with, mated to, a still more rapid vibration whose quick pulsing was felt by the brain but ever fled ere that brain could register it in terms of color. And there seemed to be a film over my sight; dazzlement from the unearthly blaze, I thought, shaking my head impatiently.

My eyes focused upon an object a little more than a foot away; my neck grew rigid, my scalp prickled while I stared, unbelieving. And that at which I stared was—a skeleton hand! Every bone a grayish black, sharply silhouetted, clean as some master surgeon's specimen, it was extended as though clutching at—clutching at—what was that toward which it was reaching?

Again the icy prickling over scalp and skin—for its talons stretched out to grasp a steed that Death himself might have ridden, a rack whose bare skull hung drooping upon bent vertebrae! I raised my hands to my face to shut out the ghostly sight—and swiftly the clutching bony hand moved toward me—was before my eyes—touched me!

The involuntary cry that sheer horror wrested from me was strangled by swift realization. And so acute was my relief, so reassuring was it to have in the midst of these mysteries some sane, understandable thing occur that I laughed aloud.

For the skeleton hand was my own! The mournful, ghastly mount of death was—our pony! And when I looked again I knew what I would see—and see them I did—two tall skeletons, skulls resting on their bony arms, leaning against the frame of the beast.

While ahead of us, floating poised upon the surface of the glistening cube, two women skeletons—Ruth and Norhala!

Weird enough was the sight, Düreresque, grimly awful as materialization of a scene of the *Dance Macabre*—and yet—vastly comforting! For we had suffered no sea change in our plunge into that pool of living incandescence.

Here was something which was well within the range of human knowledge. It was the light about us that did it; a vibration that, even as I had conjectured, was within the only partly explored region of the ultra-violet and the unexplored region above it; the home of the Roentgen ray and those other radiant phenomena akin to it.

Yet there were differences, for there was none of that misty halo around the bones seen always with the X-rays, the flesh which even they cannot render wholly invisible. The skeletons stood out clean cut, with no trace of fleshly vestments.

I crept over, spoke to the two.

"Don't look up yet," I said. "Don't open your eyes. We're going through a queer light. It has an X-ray quality. You're going to see me as a skeleton—"

"What?" shouted Drake. "Disobeying my warning he straightened, glared at me. And disquieting as the spectacle had been before, fully understanding it as I did, I could not restrain the shudder that went through me at the utter weirdness of that skull which was his head thrusting itself toward me, its bony sockets filled with shining vapors that I knew were his eyes!

The skeleton that was Ventnor turned to me; was arrested by the sight of the fitting

pair ahead. I saw the fleshless jaws clamp, the mists that were the reflections of the light upon his eyes flashed. The jaws opened to speak.

Abruptly, upon the skeletons in front of us the flesh dropped back! Girl and woman stood there once again robed in beauty! So swift was that transition from the grisly unreal to the normal that even to my matter-of-fact mind it smacked of necromancy. The next instant the three of us stood looking at each other, clothed once more in the flesh, and the pony no longer the steed of death, but our shaggy haired, patient little companion!

The light had changed; the high violet had gone from it; it was shot with yellow gleamings like fugitive sunbeams. By it I saw that we were passing through a wide corridor that seemed to stretch unending. The yellow light grew stronger.

"That light wasn't exactly the Roentgen variety," Drake interrupted my absorption in our surroundings. "And I hope to the Lord it's as different as it seemed. If it's not we may be up against a lot of trouble."

"Trouble?" I asked. "More trouble than we're in?" I added, a trifle satirically.

"X-ray burns," he answered, "and no way to treat them in this place—if we live to want treatment," he ended grimly.

"I don't think we were subjected to their action long enough, Dick," I began, and was silent.

The corridor had opened without warning into a place for whose immensity I have no images that are adequate. It was a chamber—if chamber a place can be called that was vaster than ten score of the Great Halls of Karnac in one; great as that fabled hall in dread Amenti where Osiris sits throned between the Searcher of Hearts and the Eater of Souls, judging the jostling hosts of the newly dead!

Temple it was in its immensity, its solemn vastness—but unlike any temple ever raised by human toil. Within its silence brooded a spirit unearthly, gigantic. In no ruin of giants' work in earth youth now crumbling under the weight of time had I ever sensed a shadow of the strangeness with which this was instinct; no—nor in

the shattered fanes that once had held the gods of old Egypt, nor in the pillared shrines of ancient Greece nor imperial Rome, nor mosque, basilica or cathedral.

All these had been dedicated to gods that whether created by humanity as science believes, or creators of humanity as their worshipers believed, still held in them that essence we term human. The spirit, the force, that filled this place had in it nothing, *nothing* of the human!

No place? Yes, there was one—Stonehenge. Within that mystic monolithic circle I had felt a something akin to this, as inhuman, a brooding spirit stony, stark, unyielding—as though not men but a people of stone had raised the great Menhirs.

This was a sanctuary built by a people of metal!

It was filled with a soft yellow glow like pale sunshine. Up from its floor arose hundreds of tremendous, square pillars, down whose polished sides the crocus light seemed to flow. So wide was the space between them that Notre Dame itself might have been placed within it—nor would its highest towers have reached their tops! The floor was covered with the softly gleaming saffron like a carpet of woven radiance.

Far, far as the gaze could reach the columns marched, oppressively ordered, appallingly mathematical; from their very massiveness was distilled a sense of power, mysterious, mechanical yet—living; something priestly, hierophantic—as though they were guardians of a shrine.

Now I saw whence came the light suffusing this place. High up among the pillars floated scores of orbs that shone like pale gilt frozen suns. Great and small through all the upper levels these strange luminaries gleamed, fixed and motionless, hanging unsupported in space. Out from their shining spherical surfaces darted rays of the same pale gold, rigid, unshifting, with that same suggestion of frozen stillness!

"They look like big Christmas-tree stars," muttered Drake. "I can't get 'em, Doc—are they lights—or what?"

"They're lights," I answered. "Of course they are. They're not matter—not metal, I mean—"

"There's something about them like St. Elmo's fire, witch lights—condensations of atmospheric electricity." Ventnor's voice was calm; now that it was plain we were nearing the heart of this mystery in which we were enmeshed he had clearly taken fresh grip, was again his keen, observant self.

We watched, once more silent; and indeed we had spoken little since we had begun that ride whose end we sensed close. In the unfolding of enigmatic happening after happening, the pressing in on every hand, every instant, of the utterly strange, the incredible, the mind had deserted speech and crouched listening at every door of sight and hearing and touch to gather from the messages crowding in some clue to causes, some thread of understanding.

Slowly now we were gliding through the forest of pillars; so effortless, so smooth our flight that we seemed to be standing still, the tremendous columns flitting past us, turning and wheeling around us, dizzily. My head swam with the mirage motion, I closed my eyes.

"Look!" Drake was shaking me. "Look! What d'you make of that?"

Half a mile ahead the pillars stopped at the edge of a shimmering, quivering curtain of green luminescence. High, high up past the pale gilt suns its smooth folds ran, into the golden amber mist that canopied the columns.

In its sparkling was more than hint of the dancing corpuscles of the aurora; it was, indeed, as though woven of the virescent auroral rays. And all about it played shifting, tremulous shadows formed by the merging of the aureate light with the curtain's emerald gleaming.

Up to its base swept the cube that bore Ruth and Norhala—and stopped. From it leaped the woman, drew Ruth down beside her, then turned and gestured toward us.

That upon which we rode drew close. I felt it shudder beneath me; felt on the instant the magnetic grip drop from me, angle downward, leave me free. Shakily I arose from aching knees, saw Ventnor flash down and run, rifle in hand, to his sister.

Drake bent for his fallen gun, I moved

unsteadily toward the side of the clustered cubes. There came a curious, pushing motion driving me to the edge. Sliding over upon me came Drake and the pony.

The cube tilted, gently, playfully—and with the slightest of jars the three of us stood beside it on the floor, we two men gaping at it in renewed wonder, and the little beast stretching its legs, lifting its feet and whinnying with relief.

Then abruptly the four blocks that had been our steed broke from each other; that which had been the woman's glided to them. The four clicked into place behind it and darted from sight.

"Ruth!" Ventnor's voice was vibrant with his fear. "Ruth! What is wrong with you? What has she done to you?"

We ran to his side. He stood clutching her hands, searching her eyes that were wide, unseeing, dream filled. And I saw with a definite shock of dread that upon her face the calm and stillness that were mirrored reflections of Norhala's unearthly tranquility had deepened.

"Brother!" The sweet voice seemed far away, drifting out of untroubled space, an echo of Norhala's golden chimings—"Brother, there is nothing wrong with me. Indeed—all is—well with me—brother."

He dropped the listless palms, faced the woman, tall figure tense, face drawn with mingled rage and anguish.

"What have you done to her?" he whispered in Norhala's own tongue.

The clear, serene gaze took him in, undisturbed by his wrath save for the faintest shadow of wonder, of perplexity.

"Done," she repeated, slowly. "I have stilled all that was troubled within her—I have lifted her above sorrow. I have given her the peace—as I will give it to you if—"

"You'll give me nothing," he interrupted fiercely; then, his passion breaking through all restraint—"Yes, you damned witch—you'll give me back my sister!"

In his rage he had spoken English; she could not, of course, have understood the words, but their anger and hatred she did understand. Her serenity quivered, broke. The strange stars within her eyes began to glitter forth as they had when she had summoned the Smiting Thing! Unheeding,

Ventnor thrust out a hand, caught her viciously by one bare, lovely shoulder.

"Give her back to me, I say!" he cried. "Give her back to me, damn you!"

The woman's eyes grew—awful! Out of the distended pupils the strange stars blazed; upon her face was something of the goddess outraged. Her lips parted—opening, I knew in one quick panic-filled moment, to summon her familiars. I felt the shadow of the wings of tragedy!

"No! No—Norhala! No, Martin!" the veils of calmness that had shrouded Ruth had broken, too; swiftly the girl we knew looked out from them. She struck down his hands, threw herself between the two, arms outstretched.

"For God's sake, Ventnor!" Drake caught his arms, held them tight; "that's not the way to save her, man!"

Ventnor stood between us, quivering, half sobbing. Never until then had I realized how great, how absorbing was that love of his for Ruth. And the woman saw it, too, even though dimly; envisioned it humanly. For under the shock of human passion that which I thought then as utterly unknown to her as her cold serenity was to us, the sleeping soul—I use the popular word for those emotional complexes that are peculiar to mankind—stirred, awakened.

Wrath fled from her knitted brows; her eyes dropping to the girl, lost their dreadfulness; softened. She turned them upon Ventnor, they brooded upon him; within their depths a half-troubled interest, a questioning, trembled.

A smile dawned upon the exquisite face, humanizing it, transfiguring it, touching with tenderness the sweet and sleeping mouth—as a hovering dream the lips of a slumbering maid. And on the face of Ruth, as upon a mirror, I watched that same slow, understanding, tenderness reflected!

"Come," she said, and led the way through the sparkling curtains. As she passed, an arm around Ruth's neck, I saw the marks of Ventnor's fingers upon her white shoulder, staining its purity, marring it like—a blasphemy!

For an instant I hung behind, watching their figures grow misty, fantastic, within

the scintillant shadows; then followed hastily. Entering the mists I was conscious of a pleasant tingling, an acceleration of the pulse, an increase of that sense of well-being which, I grew suddenly aware, had since the beginning of our strange journey minimized the nervous attrition of my constant contact with the abnormal; that had, indeed, enabled me to bear the ever-increasing weight of the aberrant.

Striving to classify, to reduce to order, my sensations I drew close to the others, overtaking them in a dozen paces. A dozen paces more and we stepped out of the curtainings.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE METAL EMPEROR.

WE stood at the edge of a well whose walls were of that same green vaporous iridescence through which we had just come, but finer grained, compact; as though here the corpuscles of which they were woven were far closer spun. Thousands of feet above us the mighty cylinder uprose, and in the lessened circle that was its mouth I glimpsed, faintly, the brighter stars; knew by this it opened into the free air.

All of half a mile in diameter was this shaft, and ringed regularly along its height by wide amethystine bands—like rings of a hollow piston. They were, in color, replicas of that I had glimpsed before our descent into this place and against whose gleaming cataracts the outlines of the incredible city had lowered. And they were in motion, spinning smoothly, almost it seemed with the velocity of light!

Only one swift glance I gave them, my eyes held by a most extraordinary—edifice—altar—machine? I could find no word for it—then.

Its base was a scant hundred yards from where we had paused and concentric with the sides of the pit. It stood upon a thick circular pedestal of what appeared to be cloudy rock crystal supported by hundreds of thick rods of the same material.

Up from it lifted the—structure; a thing of glistening greenish cones and spinning

golden disks; fantastic yet disquietingly symmetrical; bizarre as an angled head-dress worn by a mountainous Javanese god—yet coldly, painfully mathematical. In every direction the cones pointed, seemingly interwoven of strands of metal and of light.

What was their color? It came to me—that of the mysterious element which stains the sun's corona, that diadem seen only when our day star is in eclipse; the unknown element that science has named coronium, that never yet has been found on earth and that may be electricity in its one material form; electricity that is ponderable; electricity in metal shape; force whose vibrations are keyed down to mass; power transmuted into substance!

Thousands upon uncountable thousands the cones bristled, pyramiding to the base of one tremendous spire that tapered up almost to the top of the shaft itself. In their grouping the mind caught infinite calculations each carried out into infinity; an apotheosis of geometry compassing the rhythms of unknown spatial dimensions; concentration of the equations of the star hordes, the mathematics of the Cosmos!

■ Silently from the left of the crystalline base swept an enormous sphere. Twice the height of a tall man it was, a paler blue than any of these Things I had seen, almost, indeed, an azure; different, too, in other subtle, indefinable ways.

Behind it glided a pair of the pyramidal shapes, their pointed tips higher by a yard or more than the top of the sphere. They paused, regarding us: Out from the opposite arc of the crystal pedestal moved six other globes, somewhat smaller than the first and of a deep purplish luster.

They separated, lining up on each side of the leader now standing a little in advance of the twin tetrahedrons, rigid and motionless as watching guards.

There they stood—that enigmatic row, intent, studying us beneath their god or altar or machine of cones and disks within their cylinder walled with light—and at that moment there crystallized within my consciousness the sublimation of all the strangenesses of all that had gone before, smothering throat and heart; a panic lone-

liness as though I had wandered into an alien world—a world as unfamiliar to humanity, as unfamiliar with it as our own would seem to a thinking, mobile crystal adrift among men.

Norhala threw up both white arms in a strangely harmonious, dancing yet majestic gesture of salutation; from her throat a lilting theme of her weirdly ordered golden chanting. Was it speech, I wondered; and if so—prayer or entreaty or command?

The great sphere quivered, undulated. Swifter than the eye could follow it dilated, opened! Where the azure globe had been flashed out a disk of flaming splendors, the very secret soul of flowered flame! And simultaneously the pyramids leaped up and out behind it—two gigantic four-rayed stars blazing with cold blue fires!

The green auroral curtainings flared out, ran with streaming radiance—as though some Spirit of Jewels had broken bonds of enchantment and burst forth jubilant, flooding the shaft with its freed glories. Norhala's song ceased; an arm dropped down about the shoulders of Ruth.

Then woman and girl began to float toward the radiant disk!

As one, the three of us sprang after them. I felt a shock that was like a quick, abrupt tap upon every nerve and muscle, stiffening them into helpless rigidity; heard Ventnor groan, Drake curse.

Paralyzing that sharp, unseen contact had been, but nothing of pain followed it. Instead it had created, indeed, an extraordinary acuteness of sight and hearing, an abnormal keying up of the observational faculties, as though the energy so mysteriously drawn from our motor centers had been thrown back into the sensory.

Closely, with stereoscopic clarity, I could take in every minute detail of that flashing miracle of gemmed fires and its flaming ministers. Half-way between them and us Ruth and Norhala now were, drifting slowly; I could catch no hint of voluntary motion on their part—knew that they were not walking, but were being borne onward by some manifestation of that same force which held us motionless.

And forgot them in my contemplation of the disk!

Oval, twenty feet in height, I judged, and twelve in its greatest width, it was. A broad band, translucent as sun golden crysolite, ran about its periphery.

Set within this elliptical zodiac and spaced at mathematically regular intervals were nine ovoids of intensely living light. They shone like nine gigantic cabochon cut sapphires; they ranged from palest, watery blue up through azure and purple and down to a ghostly mauve shot with sullen undertones of crimson. In each of them was throned a flame that seemed the very fiery essence of vitality.

The *body*—was convex, swelling outward like the boss of a shield; shimmering rosy-gray and crystalline. From the vital ovoids ran a pattern of sparkling threads, irised and brilliant as floss of molten rainbows of jewels; converging with interlacings of spirals, of volutes and of triangles into the nucleus.

And that nucleus! What was it? Even now I can but guess—brain in part as we understand brain, certainly; but far, far more than that in its energies, its powers; and indescribably different even in these activities that in our race are termed the cerebral.

Like an immense rose it was; an incredible rose of a thousand close clustering petals. It blossomed with a myriad shifting hues, effulgent, rutilant. And instant by instant the flood of varicolored flame that poured into its petalings down from the sapphire ovals waxed and waned in crescendoes and diminuendoes of relucant harmonies—ecstatic, awesome.

The heart of the rose was a star of incandescent ruby!

And from flaming crimson center to aureat, flashing penumbra it was instinct with, poured forth, power—power vast and conscious!

Not with that same completeness could I realize the ministering star shapes, half hidden as they were by the disk. But I saw that their radiance was less, nor had they its miracle of pulsing gem fires. Blue they were, blue of a peculiar vibrancy; blue were the glistening threads that ran down from blue-black circular convexities set within each of the points visible to me.

And unlike in shape, their flame of vitality dimmer than the ovoids of the disk's golden zone still I knew that they were even as those—*organs*, organs of unknown senses, unknown potentialities. Their nuclei I could not observe.

The floating figures had drawn close to that disk—had paused. And on the moment of their pausing I felt a surge of strength, a snapping of the spell that had bound us, an instantaneous withdrawal of the inhibiting force. Ventnor broke into a run, holding, I noted with a thrill of apprehension, his rifle at the alert. We raced after him; were close to the shining shapes. And gasping, stopped short not a dozen paces away.

For Norhala had soared up toward the flaming rose of the disk as though lifted by gentle, unseen hands. Close to it for an instant she swung. I saw the exquisite body gleam forth through her thin robes as though bathed in soft flames of rosy pearl.

Higher she floated, and toward the right of its zodiac. From the edges of three of the ovoids swirled a little cloud of tentacles, gossamer filaments of opal. They whipped out a full yard from the disk's surface, touching her, caressing her.

For but a breath she hung there, her face hidden from us; then was dropped softly to her feet and stood, arms stretched wide, her copper hair streaming cloudily about her regal head.

And up past her floated Ruth, levitated as had been she—and her face I could see, ecstatic as though she were gazing into Paradise, and drenched with the awful tranquility of the infinite; her wide eyes stared upward toward that rose of splendors through which the pulsing colors seemed now to race more swiftly. Now for an instant she hung poised before it while around her head I saw a faint aureole begin to form—then was swung higher and toward the side as had been the woman.

Again the gossamer threads thrust forth, searched her. They ran over her rough clothing—perplexedly! They coiled about her neck, stole through her hair, brushed shut her eyes, circled her brow, her breasts, girdled her!

Weirdly was it like some intelligence observing, studying, some creature of another species—puzzled by its similarity and unsimilarity with the one other creature of its kind it knew, and striving to reconcile those differences. And still like such a questioning brain calling upon others for counsel, it swung her—and even then although the application of whatever force it was that held her suspended was not visible, I knew that its source was the disk—swung her, I say, upward to the watching star at the right.

A rifle shot rang out! Another—the reports breaking the silence like a profanation. Unseen by either of us, Ventnor had slipped to one side where he could cover the core of ruby flame that must have seemed to him the heart of the disk's rose of fire. A few yards away he knelt, white lipped, eyes cold gray ice, sighting carefully for a third shot.

"Don't! Martin—don't fire!" I shouted, leaping toward him.

"Stop! Ventnor—for God's sake!" Drake's panic cry mingled with my own.

But before we could reach him, indeed, before we had gone two paces, there happened that which in the swiftness of its occurrence was to its telling as the distant lightning stroke is to the thunder that is its record.

Like a darting swallow Norhala flew to him. Down the face of the disk glided the upright body of Ruth, struck softly, stood swaying.

And out of the blue-black convexity within the left hand star point of one of the opened pyramids darted a lance of intense green flame, a lightning bolt as real as any hurled by tempest, upon Ventnor!

The shattered air closed behind the streaming spark with the sound of breaking glass. It struck—Norhala!

It struck—seemed to splash upon her, run down her like water! One curling tongue writhed over her bare shoulder, leaped to the barrel of the rifle in Ventnor's hands, flashed up it and licked him. I saw the gun torn from his grip, hurled high in air, exploding as it went—saw him leap convulsively from his knees and drop rolling as though felled by a giant's buffet!

I heard a wailing, low, bitter and heart-broken. Past us ran Ruth, all dream, all unearthliness fled from a face now a tragic mask of human woe and terror. She threw herself down beside her brother, peered into his face, felt of his heart; then raised herself upon her knees and thrust out supplicating hands to the shapes.

"Don't hurt him any more! He didn't mean it!" she cried out to them piteously—like a child. She reached up, caught one of Norhala's hands. "Norhala—don't let them kill him! Don't let them hurt him any more! Please!" she sobbed.

Beside me I heard Drake cursing, methodically, despairingly.

"If they touch her I'll kill the woman! I will, by God I will!" I heard him mutter. Face livid, twitching with passion he strode to Norhala's side.

"If you want to live, call off those devils of yours!" His voice was strangled thick with menace.

She looked at him, wonder deepening on the tranquil brow, in the clear, untroubled gaze. Of course she could not understand his words—but it was not that which made my own sick apprehension grow.

It was that she did not understand what called them forth; nay, did not even understand what reason lay behind Ruth's sorrow, Ruth's prayer. And more and more wondering grew her eyes as she looked from the threatening Drake to the supplicating Ruth, and from them to the still body of Ventnor!

"You tell her what I say, Goodwin, in her own tongue. I mean it!"

I shook my head. That was not the way, I knew. I looked toward the disk, still flanked with its sextette of spheres, still guarded by the flaming blue stars. They were motionless, calm, watching. I sensed no hostility, no anger; it was as though they were waiting for us to—to—waiting for us to do what?

It came to me—they were indifferent! That was it—as indifferent as we would be of the struggle of an ephemera; and as mildly curious!

"Norhala," I turned to the woman, "she would not have him suffer; she would not have him die. She loves him."

"Love?" she repeated, and all of her wonderment seemed crystallized in the word. "Love?" she asked curiously.

"She loves him," I said; and then why I did not know, but I added, pointing to Drake: "and he loves her."

There was a tiny, astonished sob from Ruth. Again Norhala brooded over her. Then with a little despairing shake of her head, paced over, faced the great disk.

Tensely we waited. Communication there was between them, interchange of—thought; how carried on I would not hazard even to myself. But of a surety these two—the goddess woman, the wholly unhuman shape of metal, of jeweled fires and conscious force—understood each other!

For she turned, stood aside—and the body of Ventnor quivered, arose from the floor, stood upright and with closed eyes, head dropping upon one shoulder, glided forward toward the disk like a dead man carried by those messengers never seen by man who, the Arabs, believe carry the death-drugged souls before Allah for their awakening!

Ruth moaned and hid her eyes; tall Drake reached down, gathered her up in his arms, held her close to his breast. And in that uncanny progress was something of the super-normal that sent a chill even through my unbelieving heart.

The gliding body stood before the disk, swam up along its face. The tendrils waved out, felt of it, thrust themselves down through the wide collar of the shirt. The floating form passed higher, over the edge of the disk; lay high beside the right star point of the rayed shape to which had been passing Ruth when Ventnor's shot brought the tragedy upon us. I saw other tentacles whip forth, examine, caress!

Then down the body swung, was borne through air, laid gently at our feet!

"He is not—dead." It was Norhala beside me; she lifted Ruth's face from Drake's breast. "He will not die—it is my thought. It may be he will walk again. They cannot help," there was a shadow of apology in her tones. "They did not know. They thought it was the"—she hesitated as though at loss for words—"the—the Fire Play."

"The Fire Play?" I gasped.

"Yes," she nodded. "You shall see it. And now we will take him to my house. You are safe—now, nor need you trouble. For he has given you to me for my playthings!"

"What does she say?" demanded Drake. I translated.

"Playthings!" at any other time his amazed indignation would have been ludicrous. "He has given us to her for playthings? Who does she mean by he?"

"Who has given us to you—Norhala?" I asked, as calmly as I could.

"He"—she nodded to the disk, then spoke the phrase that was both ancient Assyria's and ancient Persia's title for their all-conquering rulers, and that meant—"the King of Kings! The Great King! Master of Life and Death!"

She had taken Ruth from Drake's arms, pointing to Ventnor.

"Bear him," she commanded, and led the way back through the walls of light.

As we lifted the body, I slipped my hand through the shirt, felt at the heart. Faint was the pulsation and slow, but regular.

Ventnor had medicines, I knew, in the saddle-bags. I could attend to him on our way to wherever it was the woman was taking us.

Close to the encircling vapors I cast one quick look behind me. The shapes stood immobile, flashing disks, gigantic radiant stars and the six great spheres beneath their geometric, super-Euclidean god or shrine or machine of interwoven threads of luminous force and metal—still motionless, still watching!

We emerged into the place of pillars. There stood the hooded pony and its patience, its uncomplaining acceptance of its place as servant to man brought a lump into my throat, salved, I suppose, my human vanity, abased as it had been by the colossal indifference of those things to which we were but playthings.

Again Norhala sent forth her call. To us out of the maze glided her quintette of familiars; again the four clicked into one. Upon its top we lifted, Drake ascending first, the pony; then the body of Ventnor.

I leaped beside it, began to look through the luggage for the medicine-case.

I saw Norhala lead Ruth to the remaining cube. Saw the girl break away from her, leap beside me, and kneeling at her brother's head, cradle it against her soft breast. Then as I found the hypodermic needle and the strychnin for which I had been searching, crouched at Ventnor's side and began my examination of him. The cubes quivered—swept away through the columned forest.

We crouched, the three of us, blind to anything that lay about us, heedless of whatever road of wonders we were on, striving to strengthen in Ventnor the spark of life so near extinction.

And as I worked I dwelt upon the dread revelation that had been thrust upon me so brutally; looked aghast upon the wreck of all my webs of theory, all my scientific beliefs, and all the hard-won standards whose

foundations I had thought were imbedded in impregnable facts.

For even until then, up to the very threshold of that revelation, subconsciously I had held fast to that selfsatisfying hypothesis that these shapes must be only marvelous automaton, perfect in their counterfeiting of human thought and will. I had done this, I admitted, now, because I had battled as man in defense of human vanity fed by the opiate lie that man, and man alone, can possess true consciousness, true reason!

Now I knew. The intelligence that ruled here was no sage, no sporadic miracle of science blown by the winds of chance to blossom in this hidden heart of the Himalayas!

It was a mind of metal!

A metal mind that looked on man as a plaything!

A metal monster!

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.



The Gallery Gods

by Murray Leinster

THE white-painted fruit steamer steamed out between the forts and turned toward the south. She only touched at Bahia del Toro to drop the mail on her downward trip, though on her return toward the north she paused to take on a portion of her cargo. The Stars and Stripes at her masthead fluttered brightly in the golden sunshine of midday, and the

same sunshine made the sea seem bluer, and the palms greener and vividly alive. Half a dozen small launches that had clustered about the white ship scattered and made for different points along the waterfront of the city.

El Señor Beckwith was seated in a great cane chair on the veranda of the white house that sprawled over the hillside. He

looked at the ship and heaved a sigh. It was not a wistful sigh, nor was there pathos concealed anywhere about it. The sigh was a sign of the satisfaction that filled him. He sat at ease, puffing a long black cigar. At his elbow a glass tinkled musically when he moved. His huge frame, now clad in spotless white duck, was eloquent of content. Only his left thumb, bandaged and in splints, gave the slightest sign of discomfort, and he smiled when he felt the incumbrance of the wrappings. It was a souvenir of the incident that caused his sensation of complete satisfaction. Conway had broken that thumb in his last struggle, two weeks before, in New York. Conway was dead.

There was a clattering of tiny hoofs. One of the house-boys had been down to the wharf to get the New York papers Beckwith had arranged should be sent him. They would contain the details of Conway's death, and Beckwith drew in a pleasurable breath at the thought of reading them.

The little donkey had brought the boy hastily up with his light burden, and now the brown-skinned boy came in to Beckwith. The papers were all there, with all their "magazine sections," their "rotogravure" illustrations, and all the other minor features on which they prided themselves. As the newspapers were handed to him, Beckwith even noticed a gaudily colored comic section. He flicked it carelessly aside.

These flimsy bundles of print had been brought four thousand miles for him to enjoy this moment. He would read of the death of Hugh Conway, multimillionaire philanthropist, patron of the arts, and other worthy things to the extent of a reportorial vocabulary, killed in the most open and daring fashion by William Beckwith, now at large. He would read of the letter left pinned to the multimillionaire's breast in which that same William Beckwith announced his reasons for killing the millionaire, and the precise fashion in which he intended to escape punishment.

Beckwith smiled cheerfully to himself as he visualized in advance the excited indignation with which the editorial comment

would point out the loophole of which he had taken advantage. For weeks to come there would be indignation and anger at his calm defiance of the law and the power of the United States, while here in Bahia del Toro he would live openly and happily, frankly glorifying in the crime he had committed, respected and feared by the people.

There were the newspapers. The murder of Hugh Conway would be good for a scarehead on the front page.

Beckwith spread out the paper with his uninjured hand and ran his eye over the head-lines. Hugh Conway—Hugh Conway. Where was it? Not on the first page. Beckwith glanced at the date with a frown. The date was that of the day after the murder, and surely it should have been a news feature. He looked on the second page. Nothing there. He ran his eye over the third page and the fourth.

He flung the flimsy sheet impatiently aside and picked a second. The date was the same, and the name of the paper was that of one of the most sensational journals in New York. That, at least, would play up the murder in great shape. A new airplane record, a crisis in Europe, a prominent divorce case. Not one word of Hugh Conway. The second page.

Beckwith rumbled the newspaper and threw it away. He bit angrily on his cigar. He had killed Conway, strangled him with his two hands. He took up the third paper, then the fourth. Not a word concerning Conway. Beckwith growled throatily, then an idea struck him.

The police might have concealed the crime for a day or more, hoping to ensnare him before he escaped. A later paper would tell. Beckwith's brow cleared. Of course that was it. He half smiled as he realized how typical such an action would be. The police would want to announce the crime and the arrest of the murderer at the same time. Wells, the commissioner of police, was fond of just such tricks. He and Beckwith and Conway had gone to school together, and Beckwith knew Wells down to the ground.

With a leisurely gesture he selected a newspaper of the day following, and unfolded it, only to frown again. The first

page was still devoted to commonplace events, and the second likewise. Still another one was barren of news on the topic that was all-important to Beckwith. He impatiently cast them down and examined those of the next day, and the next. When the last of his newspapers had joined the crumpled pile at his feet, Beckwith sat helplessly puzzled.

He was both puzzled and annoyed. His left thumb was bandaged, where Conway had dislocated it in his struggle for life. The cumbrous wrapping was still reminder of that event. Conway was dead, had been dead for three weeks, but for at least one week after his death no mention of him had appeared in any New York newspaper.

Why? Conway was well known and an important figure in the financial world. His murder, surely, would be a news item of the first importance. But not one single paragraph had been devoted to him. Beckwith had strangled him in his own motor-car, then knocked the chauffeur unconscious and escaped to a waiting yacht. The mere melodrama of the feat was enough to make it "copy" for the whole United States, let alone the city of New York. But every newspaper in New York had ignored it, as they had ignored Beckwith's scornful letter, sarcastically giving his address to the police.

Dusk had faded into twilight, and twilight into diamond-studded night. Down in the city the band played faintly in the plaza, while the long lines of dark-eyed *señoritas* promenaded primly in a duennaguarded circle, listening decorously to the music, but casting liquid glances at the olive-skinned young men who less primly strolled in the other direction, twirling their budding mustaches for the admiration of the fairer sex. Now and again the muted chords of a guitar tinkled through the air, and now and again bursts of more uproariously amorous festivity came from the section of the town devoted to the *cantinas* and their less frank adjuncts.

Beckwith put his hat upon his head and sallied into the cobble-stoned street. He would go to the American Club. Soon, he was grimly aware, he would be barred from its precincts, unless his importance under

the Garrios government overcame the normal dislike of the Anglo-Saxon for a murderer. He would go there to-night in any event. The newspapers might not have printed details of Conway's murder, but Melton, the American consul, would surely have been cabled.

Beckwith had told in his sarcastic note to Wells that he would make for Bahis del Toro, and Wells would certainly wire the consulate to find if he had actually appeared. Beckwith grinned as he thought of the touching faith of the civilian American in the efficacy of a demand by a consular representative. Wells would insist that the Nueva Bolivian government turn the criminal over to justice. He would ignore the absence of a treaty of extradition.

The interior of the club was painfully hot, and most of the members sat upon the terrace above the entrance, sipping drinks from glasses that tinkled musically. Two or three cigars glowed fitfully in the obscurity, and the white-clad figure of the *mozo* moving from chair to chair was wraithlike.

Beckwith stood in the doorway a moment before emerging. The band was good, even for a military band among a musical people. At the moment it was playing a soft and dreamy waltz, while the young people in the plaza below eddied in their endless circles, the women inside, prim and decorous, and the men without, discreetly admiring. Half a dozen sputtering lights detracted from the romance of the scene, but made it possible to catch an occasional glimpse of some darkly beautiful face, outlined in the sharp glow of the arc-lamp.

Beckwith paid no attention to that phase of the scene, but searched among the seated, coatless figures for Melton, the consul. Melton had drawn his chair close to the railing and was looking out and down upon the plaza with a curiously wistful expression. Beckwith caught sight of him when the red glow of his cigar lighted up his face for a moment. With an assumption of indifference, Beckwith dropped into the chair by his side. Melton turned and squinted at him through the darkness until he recognized who it was.

"Oh, hello, Beckwith," he said casually. "Hot, isn't it?"

He turned and surveyed the prim crowd below him, without waiting for Beckwith's acknowledgment. Melton was silent for a moment or so.

"Beckwith," he said presently, "do you know what this reminds me of? It reminds me of Springfield, Massachusetts, about November. It's so different." He half smiled to himself in the darkness. "I remember I used to be going about this time to call on some girl, with a box of candy under my arm."

"*Mozo*," said Beckwith harshly. The boy came and took his order.

"You've been down here ten years," went on the consul, still in that half-hushed tone of reminiscence. "I've been away five years from the States, but I can still picture it. Crowds of people going into vaudeville houses, others climbing excitedly on street-cars. I'd give a lot to have a street-car clang a bell at me just about now."

"I was in New York two weeks ago," said Beckwith suddenly, half minded to blurt out his reason for going north and what he had done there. "Went up there, but it was all strange. I wasn't comfortable until I got back here."

"I hope I won't feel strange," said the consul dreamily. "I'm going back next year. Do you know, I'm thinking about fried fish. They don't have the same kinds of fish down here, and they don't cook them the same way. The first thing I'm going to do when I land in New York, is to eat a meal in a restaurant. And I'm going to have fried fish and griddle cakes with maple syrup. I don't know why fried fish appeals to me so much," he added thoughtfully, "because I never cared much for them when I could get them."

Beckwith moved uneasily.

"Any news lately?" he asked, succeeding very well in keeping his tone casual.

"Nothing but the papers," answered Melton abstractedly. "Your boy was down at the dock and got a batch of them. I say, Beckwith—"

He launched forth in a vivid description of the joys of living in Springfield, Massa-

chusetts, to which Beckwith listened uninterestedly, but perforce, sipping at his grenadine rickey from time to time. When he left, Beckwith was puzzled, but convinced that there had been no message or inquiry sent to Melton from the States concerning him.

He went slowly up to his white house that sprawled over the hillside, wondering why. As he was entering his own door the obvious solution came to him.

Wells would naturally have tried to keep the murder secret for twenty-four hours. That was one of his favorite tricks, keeping a crime secret to afford himself so much start in his efforts to unravel the mystery, so that the story of the crime and the capture of the criminal could be announced at the same time. Twenty-four hours was usually his limit. Evidently, however, he had been able to extend the time on this occasion. He must have possessed an incredible influence with the newspapers to keep them for seven days from exploiting so succulent a morsel of melodrama.

Beckwith chuckled. Wells was trying to save his face. He had held off public knowledge of his failure for a week, but would be unable to keep it up much longer. When the next mail came, in seven days more, the newspapers would spread the news of Conway's death and Wells's humiliation, with Beckwith's triumph as their principal theme. A man who so defiantly flouted the law, who sneered at the police to the extent of giving them his address, would surely be made much of by the press, even if they denounced him. The next mail would tell the story, and Wells's humiliation would be the more complete for being delayed. The newspapers would flay him for trying to conceal the crime.

Beckwith went to sleep with a sense of profound satisfaction in spite of his recent disappointment.

The steamer usually made the port of Bahia del Toro about noon, but as early as nine o'clock in the morning of the next steamer day Beckwith was looking down the coast-line for the smudge of smoke that would portend the arrival of the vessel. He swept the horizon with his glasses from

time to time, growing more and more impatient. The white hull did not appear until nearly four, however, and it was five o'clock before it turned in between the forts. Beckwith went out in one of the launches to meet it, smiling in anticipation of triumph. He waved gaily to the globe-trotting passengers clustered by the after rail. They would know of Conway's death, and one of the officers of the ship would undoubtedly point him out as the man who had defied the law.

The bundle of newspapers fell into the launch with a heavy thump, and the purser who had dropped them over waved a friendly hand. The little boat backed off from the steamer and sped toward the shore, while Beckwith cut the twine about his package of papers and began to run rapidly through them, glancing only at the first-page head-lines.

The first, no, the second, no, the third. A curious sensation settled upon him. Bewilderment and unreasoning suspicion, then poignant disappointment, finally a persistent hope. He could not examine them all thoroughly in the launch. The wind threatened to blow them overboard, but he put them together in a compact package and waited impatiently until he could go over them in detail at his home.

He hastened to his house, carrying the parcel himself. He hurried into his smoking-room and flung them on the table, then went over them again, and again, each time more minutely, each time with growing incredulity.

Not one newspaper issued on any day of the second week after the murder of Hugh Conway contained one hint of that event. Not one word, line, or paragraph referred to the murder of Hugh Conway by William Beckwith. Not one faintest indication appeared in any issue of any periodical during the second week after that murder of the defiant note written by the murderer to the commissioner of police. There was nothing to make any one suspect that any harm had come to one of the foremost figures in American finance.

Beckwith rubbed his forehead in amazement and perplexity. His dislocated thumb was still *tender* where Conway had

struggled to save his life. His memory of the event was lucid and complete. He *knew* that he had killed Conway.

During the following week he brooded almost continuously over his problem. He cabled a confidential message to the Nueva Bolivian consul in New York, who knew his influence with Garrios well enough to heed his requests, asking for information about Conway. The consulate replied with a succinct list of his offices as head of this and that corporation, and added that his present whereabouts were unknown.

The message cheered Beckwith immensely. He made a resolution to wait one more week. If there was still no public news of Conway's death, he would write to the New York papers and put them in possession of the facts. He, William Beckwith, had killed Conway with his bare hands, and now resided openly in the city of Bahia del Toro. He would defy the police to punish him, and expose the duplicity of the commissioner of police, who had concealed the crime for no less than two weeks.

The steamer date arrived, but Beckwith was no longer impatient. He was calmly confident that there would be no mention of the crime in the newspapers of this week. Wells might prevent the news from ever becoming public. Beckwith had been so long in the Latin countries, where censorship is ruthless and complete, that he did not realize the impracticability of such a plan.

He watched the steamer arrive and drop the mail-bags over the side without emotion other than an abstract interest. When she came back on her way north again, he would have letters to form a part of her cargo; letters which would upset the smug complacency of the city of New York. A sodden, heavy rain was falling when the steamer made port, and it was barely visible from the house on the hill because of the sheets of falling water. Beckwith stood for a moment on his veranda and strained his eyes through the misty obscurity. The grass was exhaling fresh and fragrant odors in the rainfall. The palm-leaves were dark and glistening with the wet. Outside, the cobblestones of the street were running miniature floods of water to the gutter.

Beckwith sat comfortably indoors and smoked one of his thin black cigars, quite tranquil, waiting for the boy to bring him the papers for which he had sent.

Presently, above the humming roar of the rain on the roof and street, he heard the donkey's hoofs. A door opened. A boy's voice spoke in liquid Spanish, and then one of the servants brought him a rain-sodden bundle of flimsy printed sheets.

Beckwith quite calmly cut the twine. The papers on the inside were dry, and he spread one out, looking at it with interest which sought confirmation of a conclusion already made. Wells had concealed the crime.

"*Hugh Conway*—" The name leaped at him from the head-lines. A shock went over Beckwith so that for a moment he could read no more. His hands were shaking. Triumph welled up in his heart. He laughed for an instant, and steadied his hands against the table before him. He fixed his eyes on the printed page.

A moment later his always frightened half-caste wife was shrinking in terror from the room she had been about to enter. Her husband was in there, staring at a sheet of paper and pouring out imprecations from the dregs of two languages. He seemed so furious that his anger verged on panic.

"*Hugh Conway Announces Gift to City's Poor!*" The head-lines were those of the "feature section" of one of the larger newspapers which invariably made much of the benevolences of the rich. Below the headline a pen-and-ink portrait of Hugh Conway—Hugh Conway, whom Beckwith had killed a month before—smiled from the page.

Beckwith, with the sensation of unreality one experiences in a nightmare, read the fulsome eulogy of the dead man. But the dead man was not here described as dead. The conventional phrases of the newspaper reporter, "Mr. Conway refused to be interviewed." "At his home it was said that Mr. Conway did not wish to add anything to the statement of his attorneys, who have completed the arrangements for the gift." All the evasions and artifices of men who have failed to see an important man were used.

Through the mist of incredulous amazement, Beckwith could gather only one impression. Conway had not been seen. No one had looked upon his living form to write of him recently. Beckwith knew why, of course. Conway was dead. But why, why had this gift been announced as from a living man?

With trembling fingers Beckwith spread out the remainder of the papers. Here and there he saw references to the gift. A monster sum was to be expended for fresh-air outings for the children of the slums. Every reference spoke of the frequent benefactions of the man Beckwith knew was dead, but not one word or line referred to his murder.

True, there was no direct mention of a late interview with him, but on the other hand no faintest hint had escaped the editorial writers of the fact that he had been killed, and that his murderer had gone openly to a country from which he could not be extradited, where he was living in ease and comfort, defying the law to punish him.

When the last of the papers had been gone through, Beckwith was in a frenzy. He had killed Conway, and the papers would not mention it! He felt almost as if he were being cheated, as, in a way, he was. A large part of his triumph was the public knowledge of his superiority to both Conway and Wells. To be deprived of that was infuriating, daunting.

Beckwith suddenly got up and went from the house, to walk heedlessly in the pouring rain and try to think what could have happened to set his plans awry. Such few brown-skinned folk as saw him shrugged their shoulders and murmured softly to one another. *Los Vanquis* were mad, though el Señor Beckwith had seemed less mad than they until now. But behold him walking in the downpour!

When he finally stumbled into his own house again, Beckwith was exhausted both mentally and physically. He made his way, dripping, into the room where he had left his newspapers. His wife rose and fled from the room when he appeared, leaving behind her the picture section at which she had been looking.

She read no English, and but little Spanish, but the brown-tinted pictures gave her childish pleasure. Beckwith paid no attention to her hasty flight, but slumped down in his chair and stared gloomily at the floor. Then, suddenly, a picture on the illustrated sheet grew clear and distinct. It was a picture of Hugh Conway, at the top of his stroke, about to strike a golf-ball. The legend beneath the picture read: "Hugh Conway, well-known multimillionaire, taking a vacation from business cares at Newport. He is shown driving off from the first tee in front of the clubhouse."

Beckwith, staring at the picture of the man whose life he had choked out a month before, caught his breath and began to swear at the printed sheet, hysterically, as he might have sworn at a ghost.

When the fruit steamer stopped on its northern trip, Beckwith took possession of a cabin. He did not quite understand why he was going to New York, but he was feverishly impatient for the ship to leave Bahia del Toro. He had a letter of credit in his pocket, and was determined to find out once and for all what had happened. If Conway had escaped him before, he would not escape again.

In his stateroom Beckwith carried the last batch of papers he had received, and spent much time reading and rereading the items concerning Conway. He weighed again and again each phrase in the accounts of Conway's munificent gift to charity, hoping to find therein some hint of Conway's death. He knew Conway was dead. He had choked Conway's life from him with his two hands. But why, why, why did not the papers announce the murder?

The ship steamed up the coast with incredible slowness. It put into Havana with nerve racking deliberation. There were fresh papers to be secured there, but none of them told of the murder. Beckwith read them minutely, and as the steamer neared New York he came out on deck and paced back and forth, smoking incessantly, torturing his brain for an explanation of the silence of the newspapers.

His nerves were in shreds when they finally reached New York. He watched

the forts swing by to his left, and the tall buildings of lower Manhattan rise from the water. The fixed expressionlessness of the Statue of Liberty irritated him. He was all impatience to be ashore and free to make his final investigations. What had happened that had prevented the press from learning of Conway's death? And why had they printed no word of his murder? The leisurely manner of the customs inspectors drove him nearly frantic. When he was at last free to go ashore he was trembling from sheer nervous tension.

He went down the gangplank, an olive-skinned steward carrying his bags. He pushed roughly through the crowd of people come to meet the voyagers, and closed his ears to the soft Spanish greetings. He failed altogether to see a motion-picture photographer cranking busily. He pressed free of the assembly of people, and turned impatiently to the steward behind him.

"Trouble you to come with me, sir," said a quiet voice at his elbow.

Two unimpressive figures in civilian clothes stood, one on either side. The hand of each was in his coat-pocket, where a suggestive bulge warned against resistance.

"What the devil!" began Beckwith furiously, and stopped.

Wells was standing there, smiling sarcastically at him—Wells the commissioner of police.

"You're under arrest for Hugh Conway's murder, Beckwith," he said caustically.

A dozen or more delighted men watched the scene, cameras and note-books busy. Beckwith saw the unmistakable signs of the reportorial trade. There was even a woman or two among them, "sob-sisters" beyond a doubt.

"We might as well make it a nice, dramatic moment, Beckwith," Wells said dryly. "I got your letter, pinned to Conway's breast. Kind of you to tell me where you were going, and that you couldn't be extradited. I wouldn't have got you but for that. I knew you'd look in the papers for news of your feat; as a matter of fact, you mentioned it in your letter, so I took the boys here into my confidence"—he nodded

at the group of newspapermen—"and they agreed to help out. Their owners O. K.'d the scheme, and the murder was kept absolutely secret from the public and the press.

"We gave you two weeks to get worried, and then announced Conway's bequest to charities—it was really in his will—and printed a picture or so of him. You rose to the bait, all right. We couldn't touch you in Nueva Bolivia, but as soon as you boarded the steamer, we had you. We let you come on to New York alone, though, to save trouble. We're much obliged to you, I'm sure."

Beckwith suddenly understood. He had not won his revenge and freedom after all. He had not proven himself cleverer than Wells. He had lost, utterly and irreparably. He had been lured into the power of the law by nothing more than silence. But the thing that cut deepest into his heart, that made the cup of his humiliation run over, was a final remark of Wells. The reporters were listening intently.

"I guess that's all, boys," said Wells indulgently. "No more to be said. You'll have a good story for the evening editions. Beckwith couldn't resist playing to the gallery gods."



MY PIPE AND I

BY BLAKENEY GRAY

MY pipe and I are comrades true—
He cheers me when I'm feeling blue;
And when he's feeling cold and grim
I set him smoking with a vim.

When he's with me I seem to see
Fair visions of sure victory;
Great things in store for me and mine,
With fortune waiting on the line.

Sometimes he sends a purple mist
From out his bowl, by heaven kissed,
Which, as it rises, softly seems
The very fount of lovely dreams;

And in its varied shapes of grace
Reveals at last one treasured face
That some day I shall hope to see
The partner of my pipe and me!

She whom I wed, when she doth know
How he hath kept that flame aglow
That in my heart hath known no end,
Will not be jealous of my friend;

But, as we sit and sweetly dream
Before the twilight ember's gleam,
In those glad days of loverhood,
Will love as I my brierwood!

Bing, Bang, Boom!

by Raymond Leslie Goldman.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BUBBLE BURSTS.

WITH a hoarse cry of mortal agony, Paprika staggered forward, reeled, spun round, and dropped heavily to his knees, facing his smiling, treacherous executioner.

"T-Turner!" he gasped, swaying on his knees, his hands gripping his sides in a frenzy of horrible pain. "You—killed me! You—killed—me—you—you lyin'—son-of-a—"

Standing there before his tortured victim, holding the smoking revolver in his steady hand, Turner smiled.

"I saved you a lynching, Blake," he said evenly. "Thank me."

A loud knocking sounded on the door, the sheriff's excited voice raising itself above it.

"Ellis! Ellis! Did he shoot you? Ellis, did—"

"I'm all right, Joe," Turner called out. "I'll be out in a minute."

Paprika clung to his ebbing life, still swaying on his knees, raising his glassy, suffering eyes to Turner's, trying to articulate through the bloody froth that came to his lips:

"You — you — dog — lyin' — black-hearted—dog—you—"

And gasping, gurgling, choking forth the words through his bullet-torn chest, he

rained down upon Turner the curses of a dying man. He damned him in the name of God and in the name of the devil, couching his awful condemnation in terms of invective that would have withered a nobler soul than Turner's.

And through it all Turner listened with the smile still on his lips; listened until a mortal gush of blood swept upward through Paprika's twisted mouth, drowning the words in its red ebb-tide of life. A great shudder shook the man's giant frame, the accusing eyes rolled upward, and he fell, face downward, upon the carpet.

Turner waited a moment, until the twitching form had become quite still; then he stooped over it and took from a pocket a small roll of bills. Then he walked to the door, unlocked it, and opened it to the men who were clamoring for admittance.

At the sight of the still, blood-bathed figure on the floor, the sheriff purpled with impotent rage.

"What did you kill 'm fer?" he cried, shaking his fist in Turner's face. "What did you kill 'm fer? You knew I didn't want 'm dead! You knew it! You—"

Turner gripped the sheriff's arm and drew him aside, putting his lips close to Warren's ear:

"Here's why, Joe," he said in a low voice: "Because, like the dirty yellow dog that you are, you tried to bite the hand

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for July 31.

that's feeding you. You get me, don't you, Joe? And the best thing to do in a case like that is to pull out the yellow dog's teeth."

He paused, and pointed to the lifeless form of Paprika. "And I did," he finished with a meaning smile.

It seemed that Selma was never again to subside to that tranquil state of somnolence that attended it prior to the startling advent of Bing, Bang, Boom. After Bert had been in Selma a week, people began to regard him as a sort of human dynamo that constantly generated a powerful current of seethy excitement in quantities sufficient to pervade the entire village. They spoke of him only as "that there Bing, Bang, Boom," and whenever he appeared among them, they waited breathlessly "fer somethin' onusual to happen."

It usually did happen. Now that Selma was aroused, it found no need of pinching itself to keep from lapsing into its erstwhile lethargy. Before the tragic incident of Paprika's running amuck had spent its first thrill, Selma had pounced upon another vivifying stimulant, all the more potent because it had an ingredient of secrecy in it.

Early one morning, Bert led a small army of workmen through the streets to the Majestic Hotel; and soon that long-neglected building became the scene of bustling activity. Painters' scaffolds swung at its walls, carpenters' hammers rapped merrily within, chugging vacuums sucked the thick dust from its furnishings, broken window-panes were replaced with new, swishing scythes cleared the lawns of their rank growths of weeds: in short, it was apparent to all that the Majestic was coming to life!

This, in itself, was sufficient to stir a ripple to the placid surface of Selma. After seven long, soporiferous years, Selma would again come into its own! There were few who did not remember the glorious days of the old Majestic. Then, it had been the Monte Carlo of the Middle West. Every train had paid its toll of visitors at Selma's portals before it rushed away.

But now, at a time when gambling was

no longer permitted, what was the Majestic to be? What was to attract those wealthy, freely spending city folks to Selma?

Bert and Fred Patterson, running a gauntlet of veiled and pointed questions every time they ventured upon the street, kept their own counsel. They had agreed that until everything was in readiness to launch their advertising campaign, it would be wise to keep secret their plans for the Majestic.

"It doesn't do any harm to keep mum," said Fred, "and it may do harm to let it get around. Better not say anything, and be on the safe side."

"I don't see what harm could come of telling it," Bert replied: "but we'll keep it under cover, anyway. I suppose Turner is doing a bit of wondering himself."

Fred shrugged. "All Turner thinks about now is getting that franchise for a power company. When he gets that, he'll have this town more under his thumb than ever."

"Isn't there some way to prevent him—" Bert began; but Fred interrupted him with a mirthless laugh.

"Prevent him! What a chance! Why, he owns every selectman, body and soul. As a matter of record, I've been fighting against it in *The Punch*, but that won't keep him from getting that franchise. You remember what he told the crowd the morning you arrived here: that fifteen thousand he got from you is going into a powerhouse—of the people, for the people, by the people—*phooee!*"

"You want the city to own it, don't you?"

"Of course I do. That would be the square deal thing, wouldn't it? Then the profits could be used to improve the roads that need repair so badly, instead of going into Ellis Turner's pockets. Oh, well—what's the use of talking!"

"Wait till we've got the Majestic going," promised Bert. "We'll have something to fight him with then."

The day after his fight with Paprika, Bert, aching in every joint, had journeyed to Pinebluff to apply for a loan of ten thousand dollars. Three days later the loan was granted; and Bert immediately arranged

with a Pinebluff contractor to put the building in repair.

During the next ten days he had traveled to Pinebluff six times. He purchased furniture, rugs, draperies; he contracted for electricity and gas; he attended to a hundred and one things—and to all with a buoyant, boyish enthusiasm that bespoke his supreme confidence in the success of the new Majestic.

He did not see Ruth for two weeks after that fateful evening, but he received a note from her, a few days later—couched in terms that were decidedly formal, despite their unmistakable sincerity—thanking him for his “valiant rescue” of her from “that horrible, horrible man.” There was no slightest allusion to their former relations, nor was there a promise of future friendship implied; and Bert read it through with a scowl in his eyes.

“The mischief with her!” he muttered, starting to tear up the note, but, instead, slipping it back into the scraggly edged envelope and putting it carefully away in his dresser-drawer. “If she thinks I’m going to run after her, she’s mistaken! I should say *not!*”

He didn’t “run after her,” as a matter of fact. But this, though he did not quite realize it, was because his “valiant rescue,” of her had placed him in a position that forbade such importunate advances as he had made that morning on Majestic Road. She would, indeed, be forced to talk to him now, or be guilty of the basest ingratitude; and of such a condition he could never take unfair advantage.

For this reason, when he met her on the street early one morning, he was about to pass her with merely a murmured salutation, when, for some unexplainable reason, he paused a few paces beyond her and turned back. She, too, had stopped and turned back; and a moment of embarrassed silence hung between them as they faced each other. Then:

“You’re out early this morning, Miss Warren,” said Bert.

“I’m out early every morning,” Ruth replied. “Classes take up at eight thirty, you know. Didn’t you know I teach?”

“Yes, I knew it,” Bert answered. He

was vaguely uncomfortable as he stood before her. He felt that he was forcing this conversation upon her; that he was, after all, taking advantage of the condition that compelled her to meet his advances with seeming graciousness. He decided that he had better make it very brief—

“Did you ever receive the note I sent you, Mr. Boom?” she asked, after a pause.

He nodded. “Thank you so much for it,” he said, with such inordinate politeness that a glint of puzzlement crept into her eyes. Two weeks of reflection had served to dispel the never very firm opinion that her dislike for Bert was whole-hearted, and she had been prepared to meet him half-way in the delicate matter of changing open hostility to cordial friendship.

Now, Bert’s strange reserve, so different from the attitude she had thought would be his at this meeting, disappointed and surprised her. She could not, of course, know the real reason for his coolness, and she logically attributed it to his change of heart. Well, she wouldn’t force her friendship upon him if—

“I—I suppose I’d better be going, Mr. Boom,” she said, breaking into another awkward pause. “I mustn’t be late to class.”

“It wouldn’t be a very good example for your pupils,” he remarked with a faint smile. “Good morning, Miss Warren.”

He lifted his hat and walked away, dimly conscious of the fact that the brief meeting had been an utter failure. And yet, he decided, he had done the gentlemanly thing in showing her that he would not exact payment for her debt of gratitude to him.

“Darn it!” he thought miserably. “I wish I’d never got into this position. What can I do *now!*”

The ensuing week was a busy one for Bert. There were still many details in connection with the Majestic Hotel’s opening that demanded his attention, and despite the distressing reflection that Ruth was further away from him than ever, there was always a lilt in his heart as he performed his necessary tasks.

His was an indomitable optimism that quickly routed any depression that resulted

from his recurring thoughts of Ruth. Anyway, he consoled himself, he was about to fulfil two of his three boasts that he had made to her: he was defeating Ellis Turner, and recalling the Majestic to life; and he would not believe that the thing he wanted most of all to accomplish would forever be impossible.

At the end of a week, the last workman departed from the Majestic, and in the clearing on Prospect Hill, now swept clean of its weeds, but bitten to the brown shagginess of an Airedale's coat by a precocious frost, the hotel, in its transformation, stood gleaming white in the October sunshine. Inside and out, the building was reborn; and Bert, letting his dancing eyes feast upon its new beauty, thrilled at the thought that it represented a decisive victory over the hated Turner.

The descriptive booklets, for whose persuasive rhetoric Fred was responsible, were all ready to be sent out to the public; and Bert felt certain that before another month would pass, the Majestic would be booked solidly for the season. He did not doubt for a moment the appeal that his hostelry would make to the public.

In addition to the nerve-soothing quietude which was the primary attraction, he was prepared to offer his prospective guests certain means of recreation that would forego the possibility of monotony. He had laid out several tennis courts in the rear of the building; he had made definite arrangements with Seth Caldwell, Selma's liveryman, so that there would be horses for those who cared to ride or drive; and there would be a nightly concert—nothing jazzy, of course, but music that would be fitting to the nature of the resort.

"And some day," he told Fred, "when I get some money, I'm going to buy that land to the east of the hotel and lay out a golf course."

"That land belongs to Turner," Fred declared.

Bert laughed. "So much the better. I'm beginning to think that Turner's a real estate bargain-counter. He meant to swindle me, and instead, he sold me a wonderful proposition. Isn't that the truth?"

Late one afternoon—the day when work

upon the Majestic was completed—Bert entered *The Punch* office, and found it deserted excepting for the tow-headed printer's devil who was languidly wiping the ink-rollers. The boy informed him that Fred would return "purty soon"; and Bert seated himself, and, with a smile on his lips that was a reflection of the one in his joyous heart, picked up one of the alluring booklets from the great stack of them on the floor and read it over and over again.

His thoughts, though, were not on the printed page, which he knew by rote, nor on the photographic reproductions of the Majestic's charms. In place of it all, he saw the face of Ruth, now warm with smiles, now chilled by a spirited hauteur, but always rarely beautiful; the soft, brown eyes that could never quite attain to coldness, with their long, dark, sweeping lashes, and narrow lines of brow; the small nose that wrinkled just a trifle when she smiled; the full red lips that were dangerously enticing even when she narrowed them in her flashing intolerance.

He wondered what she would think when she saw one of the booklets—they were to be released that night—and learned how he had fulfilled his promise to recall the Majestic back to life. He knew that she would rejoice in his success, if for no other reason than that it represented the defeat of Ellis Turner.

The hurried entrance of Fred into the office brought him reluctantly away from his thoughts; but when he caught sight of Fred's face he forgot all else but the flushed redness of it and the unmistakable grimness into which his features were set.

"Why—what's the matter, Fred?" he queried.

Fred threw his hat savagely to the desk and, spurning a chair, began to pace the room with long strides. Suddenly he stopped before his wondering friend.

"Bert," he pronounced solemnly, "I—I've got bad news for you!"

Bert started. "Bad news?" he repeated.

"Our 'rest resort' plans got all over town already," went on Fred, "and of course Turner heard about it and—and made some plans himself! We're—you're ruined, Bert!"

Bert leaped to his feet.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "Supposing Turner knows—"

"Bert," Fred cut in, speaking with the slow reluctance of a man who must hurt a dear friend, "I just learned that Turner got his franchise, *and he's going to build the power-house on his land next to the Majestic!*"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INDICTMENT.

IT was a cruel, bitter blow to Bert, all the more stunning because it was so unexpected. His confidence had been so sure, so undoubting, so supreme, that now the shattering of all his fond hopes staggered him and filled him with numbing despair.

The brighter and sunnier the summer sky, the more tenebrous appears the cloud that suddenly banks to overcast it; and to Bert, this cloud that so impenetrably darkened the brightness of his visualized future was the symbol of his ignominious defeat at the hands of Ellis Turner.

Against this crushing move of Turner's he was powerless to fight. With a humming, droning power-house next to the Majestic, tainting the restful stillness with its incessant, monotonous voice, the very foundation upon which he had constructed his plans was blasted to crumbling mortar. There was no way of getting around *that*. Turner's victory was complete, overwhelming.

The descriptive booklets, which now need never to be mailed, were stacked away in the basement of *The Punch* office. Bert wanted to destroy them; but Fred, like the mother who treasures still the little garments of a departed child, would carry them carefully down-stairs to save them only for a dust-gathering oblivion.

Not heeding the supper-hour, the young men stayed on in the little office that had suddenly become so gloomy, speaking seldom, and then in low voices, as if they were in a chamber of death. There was no spirit left to either of them. They were beaten, and they knew it.

• At eight thirty Bert took his leave. His

horse and buggy were still standing in front of the office, and, with no particular purpose, he drove out to the Majestic Hotel.

In the silent, moon-blanching clearing, his hotel stood, dead-white, its darkened windows staring forth like the glassy, sightless eyes of the blind. Beyond it, caught like a kite in the tree-tops, swam the full moon, a rain-portending ring of mist encircling it—a luminous gyroscope hanging in the dark, star-studded tract of the heavens.

He drove up to the porte-cochere and, mounting to the loggia, let himself in with his key. Inside, with his flashlight slicing a long white cone from the darkness, the base of it dancing about the walls, he found out a wall-switch and pressed it. The room sprang into sudden dazzling light, the very brilliancy of it and of the great hall it disclosed wounding him with another pang of sorrow.

There, at the far end of the room, was the office, the long desk glistening—as did every other bit of woodwork—with fresh varnish. There, opposite the entrance door was the great stone fireplace, with a semicircle of armchairs facing it. That very morning, when he had stood there, his hopeful eyes had seen this great hall peopled with his contented guests, standing at that desk to get their keys and mail, reckoning in that semicircle of chairs to stare dreamily into a dancing, cracking log-fire. But now, with his eyes cleared to reality, he saw it all just as it was—empty, cold, repellent.

Aimlessly, he walked from room to room on the lower floor, switching on the lights as he entered, clicking them out as he left—a forlorn figure of a man, trying thus to gain a mite of consolation by a glimpse of work accomplished, and only adding to his already brimming cup of sorrow by the sight of such futile achievement.

As he passed a long wall-mirror, he caught sight of his reflection in it, and it gave him pause. Was he the man they spoke of as Bing, Bang, Boom? Was that drooping, spiritless man before him an image of the one who fought hardest when he was beaten? Who would not acknowledge defeat as long as a spark of life burned within him?

He stared, with feelings akin to horror,

at his slumping form and haggard face. Suppose that Ruth should see him like that! What would she think of him now? Wouldn't she spurn him for a quitter? Believe him to be like some piece of fireworks, flaring up into brilliancy once or twice, then remaining nothing but a burned-out, blackened shell?

And with that thought—that straightened his sagging shoulders and lifted his chin from his chest—came another. Was he beaten? Did Turner's obstruction of that single plan spell utter ruin? As he had once, so could he not again think of some "attraction"—one that even Turner's noisy power-house could not affect?

Two dabs of color sprang out from the pallor of his cheeks, a faint flush that was painted half by the hand of revived hope and half by the hand of shame. He was shamed by the thought of the dejection that had gripped him; shamed by the thought that he had momentarily acknowledged submission to Turner. Well, he would retrieve himself for that. He would fight all the harder now. He wasn't beaten! He would find a way!

When he left the hotel and climbed back into his buggy, he was once again Bing, Bang, Boom.

As he circled the driveway that led to Majestic Road he thought that he saw lights moving about in the field that lay to the left of the hotel grounds, and when he drew rein and listened into the stillness, the faint sound of voices came to him. He drove on. Very likely it was Turner and some friends looking over the ground that was to harbor the power-house. Fred had informed him that work upon it was to be begun immediately.

"Well, Turner," he muttered, turning to face the moving eyes of light, "you've given me a peach of a wallop, but I'm not knocked out yet!"

But his problem was not one that mere determination could solve. He struggled with it until far into the night; it was with him at his waking the following morning; and the more he thought upon it, the more hopelessly he seemed to be entangled.

He was now in debt to the amount of ten thousand dollars, which exacted an an-

nual interest of six per cent, and his original five thousand dollars had dwindled to less than twenty-five hundred. It was true that he was now possessed of a hotel that was ready to throw open its doors to guests, but he despaired of ever finding another attraction to take the place of the quiet that Turner would soon despoil. The proximity of a noisy power-house not only decreased the value of his property, but it made the hotel very undesirable to guests that might be lured to it by whatever plan he might devise.

He had awakened with the dawn, and he had lain abed until the sun was well up, thinking about his new state of affairs. Now, because he felt a wave of melancholy coming upon him again, threatening him with the spiritless inertia he scorned, he jumped up, drew on his clothes, and went down-stairs. Inaction, he decided, was fatal to him. He must do something—keep at a distance the numbing despair to which reflection gave rise.

After he had finished breakfast, and emerged from the dining-room to the lobby, he was confronted by Sheriff Warren.

"Noah Spigot wants to see you," said the sheriff. "I been waitin' fer you."

"Noah Spigot!" Bert exclaimed. "The prosecuting attorney?"

Warren nodded. "Yeh. He sent me to fetch you to his office."

"That's funny," said Bert. "What does he want to see me about?"

Warren shrugged, "Ain't fer me to say, young man. Wants to talk to you, I reckon. Ready?"

"Sure," Bert replied, wondering. "Come on."

The sheriff was persistently reticent, and after several unsuccessful attempts to engage him in conversation, Bert accepted the silence, maintaining it until they reached the city hall, and climbed the stairs to the prosecuting attorney's office on the second floor.

Noah Spigot was alone in the room. He was seated at a large table which could not have been littered with more papers and documents had he been Attorney General of the United States. He was fussing among them with his rather pudgy hands

when Bert and the sheriff entered the room, and for some moments he did not look up at his guests. Ignoring them, he reached for a pen, squinted at the point through one eye, dipped it into the ink-well, and, with many flourishes, signed his name to several of the papers before him. Then he looked up.

"Ah!" he said, adjusting his horn-rimmed spectacles, despite the fact that they were already properly placed. "I see you've brought him, sheriff. Very good! Very good, indeed! Now, if you please, sheriff, close the door tight when you go out."

When the door had closed behind the sheriff, Spigot directed his gaze, frown and voice toward Bert.

"Young man, I summoned you in order to ask you a few questions."

He paused; and Bert, perceiving that an invitation to seat himself was omitted, mentally extended one to himself, and accepted forthwith.

"Why, certainly, Mr. Spigot," he replied, drawing up his chair to the table. "Ask ahead."

"Before I proceed with the examination," said Spigot, giving a prolonged clearing to his throat, "I wish to inform you that whatsoever you say here and now might be used against you later."

"Might be used against me later!" Bert echoed in surprise. "What do you mean by that?"

"Ahem!" said Spigot. "We'll reserve that information until later. In the first place, where were you last night between the hours of eight and ten?"

"Look here!" cried Bert. "What's the main idea of this cross-examination? Somebody been murdered?"

"Not at all; not at all," replied Spigot. "I told you that you'd be informed in due time. I believe you agreed to answer a few questions."

Bert shrugged. "I don't get the mystery, but help yourself. I was at my hotel last night."

"The Majestic, you mean."

"Of course."

"I see." Spigot leaned forward across the table, his eyes fixed searchingly upon

Bert's face. "What were you doing there?"

"Nothing," Bert replied with a slight smile. "I had no object in going there, if that's what you're driving at, and I didn't do a dog-goned thing when I got there."

"Ahem!" said Spigot. "Your answer is, as you'll agree, evasive. But *nemo tenetur prodere se ipsum*, so we must accept it as *sine qua non*. You admit, however, that you were at the Majestic Hotel some time between the hours of eight and ten?"

"I admit it," Bert replied, somewhat amused, despite his puzzlement, "although I've sort of forgotten my Caesar. But, as you say, I admit it, *veni, vidi, vici*."

Spigot flushed angrily. "This is no time for jest, sir!" he cried, ponderously. "The law is not to be treated lightly, especially by one whom is facing the serious charge of wilful destruction *ab ardendo*! Remember, sir, that you are under examination by the county prosecutor!"

Bert grew serious then, indeed.

"I'm facing a charge of what?" he demanded.

Mr. Spigot had a great idea of his oratorical powers and his importance. He had displayed the one and vindicated the other. He relaxed a trifle.

"Last night," he said slowly, "at some time after ten o'clock, a fire was discovered in the Majestic Hotel. Fortunately, certain persons were in the vicinity of the building at the time, discovered it, and extinguished it before any damage was done. You had the building fully insured, did you not?"

Bert leaned forward, scattering the papers on the table with his arms. His eyes narrowed and his jaw suddenly shot forward.

"So that's what you're getting at! You want to make out that I tried to burn down my hotel, eh? Why, this is the first I heard of any fire there—if there really was one. What kind of a dirty frame-up is this, Spigot?"

"Sir!" cried Spigot. "Are you insinuating—"

"I'm insinuating nothing," said Bert. "I want to get this thing straight. Have you some sort of charge against me?"

"The charge against you," Spigot replied, "is attempted arson. The information against you justifies your immediate arrest. Wait!" He rose and walked to a door that led to an inner room, opening it and beckoning within. "Please step in here, gentlemen," he called.

In answer, five men emerged from the inner room and grouped themselves about the table at which Spigot again seated himself. Bert knew them all. There was Ellis Turner, the young man, Gadsby, who had written his insurance, Selectman Cass Bidwell, and two other men, whose names Bert forgot, but whom he recognized as members of the posse who had gone with him to the Majestic in search of Paprika. Bert rose to his feet and swept the line of faces with scornful eyes.

"So this is the bunch who accuse me, eh, Spigot?" he asked, turning to the prosecutor. "Well, they're just the ones I'd name if I had to guess who they were. Turner, and his crowd of stool-pigeons!"

"Sit down, sir!" Spigot demanded. "Mr. Turner, will you kindly repeat what you know of this affair?"

"Certainly," Turner replied, looking at Bert, who remained standing. "Last night Mr. Bidwell and I drove out to look over some land of mine, adjoining the Majestic Hotel, on which I am about to build a power-house for the city. We noticed that some one was in the hotel when we arrived, for the lights were turned on; and a short time later we saw this man leave the hotel and drive away. He had turned out the lights when he left; but Mr. Bidwell and I noticed a flickering glow through one of the windows, just after Boom drove away.

We investigated, and found that a pile of rubbish in a corner of the large room on the ground floor was on fire and was threatening to ignite the entire building. We broke a window and climbed through, and managed to stamp out the flames before any considerable damage had been done.

"Now, Mr. Spigot," went on Turner, "it was very apparent to us—and particularly to me—how that fire had originated, and why it had been set. The news that I intended to build a power-house next to the hotel reached this young man early

yesterday evening. It came as a blow to him, because it ruined his plans for the operation of his hotel—which plan is familiar to you.

"The property into which he had sunk ten thousand dollars of borrowed money, besides his original investment, was rendered absolutely worthless to him after his plan of operation was spoiled. The only chance he had of getting any return at all from his investment was to collect the insurance he had on the building. Mr. Gadsby, here, wrote him insurance for fifteen thousand dollars, about a month ago. Is that correct, Gadsby?"

Gadsby nodded, and Turner continued:

"I can give you evidence, Mr. Spigot, that the idea of burning down the hotel had been in Boom's mind for some time. The night that our detachment of the posse went to the Majestic after Blake, we all entered the hotel carrying torches. Some one gave a warning to take care lest we set the building on fire; and Boom mentioned that it was insured, and so it made little difference if it was burned.

"Of course, it was said in apparent jest; but I merely want to show you that the idea was in his head, just the same. Mr. Steele and Mr. Haskell were present that night, and they'll confirm what I said." He paused. "Briefly, that's the evidence I have for you, Mr. Spigot."

Bert listened to this accusation without making any attempt to interrupt the speaker. To break in with repeated denials of his guilt would have been childish in its futility. He maintained his difficult silence until Turner had finished, and the prosecutor addressed him with:

"Well, sir, you heard the evidence against you, in part, and you know what you stand accused of. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"What have I got to say?" Bert replied, the dark flush that overspread his face, and his rapidly rising and falling chest alone betraying his emotions. "Why—I haven't anything to say."

"Are you guilty or are you not guilty?" asked Spigot.

"You know I'm not guilty," said Bert.

"Can you give me any reasons why you

shouldn't be indicted for this crime, according to the sworn testimony I have here?" He pointed to some papers on his desk.

"Turner has told you to indict me—and of course, you must indict me," said Bert, meaningly. "That's all there is to it."

"You've nothing else to say?"

"Nothing else," Bert replied, clenching his fists. "But—"

Perhaps Turner anticipated just such a move on the part of Bert, for he flung himself aside at the very moment that Bert leaped at him. He was not quite quick enough, though, to escape Bert's flying fist, and the blow found his cheek, hurling him back to the wall. In a thrice, the four men had hold of Bert, pinioning his arms. He did not struggle. He looked at them, and then at Turner, a twisted smile on his lips.

"That's the second one I've given you, Turner," he said quietly. "One of these days I'm going to give you the thrashing of your life."

Spigot had run to the door, and in answer to his lusty calls, Sheriff Warren appeared.

"Sheriff Warren," cried Spigot, pointing a shaking finger to Bert, "arrest that man!"

With averted gaze the sheriff advanced and laid his hand on Bert's arm.

"This is a durn poor way o' showin' gratitude," he muttered, as he led his prisoner to the door.

"Forget it," said Bert. "Duty is duty, sheriff."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAVID TELLS A FUNNY STORY.

WHEN Prosecuting Attorney Spigot entered his office the next day, upon his return from dinner, his first impression was that he had been cast into the very heart of a London fog. Where the smoke was heaviest, there sat David Hodge, sprawled out comfortably in Spigot's armchair, converting the last three minutes of one of Jarge's "Thirty

Minutes Near Havana" into dense blue clouds.

For a moment the prosecutor stood back in the doorway, his face screwed up into a sniffing grimace; then hurried across the room to the window and flung it open.

"My! My!" he exclaimed, walking back to the center of the room, where he could face the station-master—since David had made no move to face him. "What in the world are you smoking?"

"Seegar," David replied. "Have one?"

"No thank you," Spigot declined significantly. "How could you stand it in here with the window down?"

"Didn't even notice it," said David, looking about him, as if he observed the smoke for the first time. "That's how it is with some men's souls, Noah. They let 'em git rotten an' smelly so gradual like, they don't hardly notice it, themselves, even though 'most everybuddy else kin tell it soon's they see 'em. How you been, Noah? Ain't seen you fer an age."

"I been quite well, David," replied Spigot. "How about you?"

"Tol'erable," said David, rising. "Guess you're wantin' your own chair, Noah. I'll take this'n."

There was a space of silence while the two men seated themselves. Then Spigot asked:

"Come to see me about anything in particular, David?"

"Oh, no; nothin' parti'lar," David answered. "Jest thought I'd drop in an' have a leetle talk with you, since I ain't seen you fer such a long time. You ain't too busy now, are you?"

"No, no; no, indeed!" assured Spigot. "Business can wait when an old friend calls."

As a matter of fact, Spigot was intensely curious. He had known the station-master long enough to feel certain that his visit was not without purpose. David's actions, he knew, were always motivated. Besides, their relations had not been such as to warrant a purely social call.

"I hear you locked up that young Boom feller," said David after a pause.

Spigot nodded. "You bet I did. There's a tough proposition for you, David. Why,

he tried to clean out the office before we could subdue him and lead him to jail. The penitentiary's the place for a young rogue like him."

"Ye-es," drawled David. "He must be a wild 'un from what I been hearin'. What's he been doin' now? Tried to burn down his hotel fer insurance, didn't he?"

Again Spigot nodded. "A clear case of attempted arson. He'll get sent up, sure."

"Is that so?" said David. "Why, I understood that you was goin' to withdraw the charge an' let him out 'n jail to-day."

"Where did you hear such foolishness as that?"

David shrugged. "Durned if I remember. But that's what I understood. I thought mebbe you didn't consider the evidence against him enough to try him on't."

"Ridiculous!" scoffed Spigot. "I never had a more complete case in my life."

"I'm surprised to hear that," said David. "Guess there ain't no truth in what I hear about you resignin' from office, neither?"

"Resignin'! Me?"

"I understood you was thinkin' of it," said David. "Thought you was goin' to leave town or somethin'."

Spigot laughed. "Where in the world have you been hearing such outlandish tales, David? Somebody's been joking you, I guess. Why, I haven't the slightest intention of giving up this office, and as for leaving town—why—where did you hear that, David?"

"Can't seem to remember *where* I heard it," David replied, scratching his head.

"It's jest what I *understood*." He paused.

"Ever read the Pinebluff papers, Noah?"

"Sometimes. Why?"

"Interestin'," said David. "Engineer Knopp on the 10.06 throws me a paper every day. Jest been readin in to-day's paper that they're startin' to build a new op'ry-house."

"You don't say!"

"I did."

"You did what?"

"Did say," replied David. "Why do you say I don't?"

Spigot drew a deep breath, and began to twist his fingers. He wondered how long his boresome visitor would remain.

He supposed now that the call was prompted solely by curiosity concerning the ridiculous rumors David had heard; and he regretted the friendly welcome that had encouraged David to stay.

"Saw where a interestin' case is comin' up fer trial in the East somewheres," David remarked, tossing the remains of his cigar into the cuspidor, and lighting a fresh cheroot which he took from his pocket. "Some State Senator is facin' trial fer tamperin' with his election. Paper says it 'll go hard with him. Reckon he deserves it, eh?"

"Why—he certainly does, if he's guilty," Spigot replied, shifting uncomfortably.

"What's the law fer fraudulent elections in this State, Noah? Jail sentence?"

"In certain instances—yes."

"Bribery, forgery—an' things like that; jail sentence, eh?"

Spigot nodded. "Why—why do you ask, David?"

"Jest wondered. Bet there's a lot of crooked work goin' on every election that ain't never found out, eh?"

"Not—not very likely," replied the prosecutor, uneasily. "It's difficult to put over anything like that, and mighty risky. Besides, we—we have ways of finding out that everything about an election is all right."

"There *are* ways," David agreed. "But sometimes, I reckon, it's done so durn clever that it couldn't never be found out, exceptin' by accident. That's possible, ain't it?"

"It's possible, of course."

David chuckled. "Reminds me of a funny story I once heard about that. Funniest durn thing you ever did hear! Like to hear it, Noah?"

Spigot wanted to say "No"; that he had work to do that wouldn't wait *all* day; but curiosity gripped him again, and, instead, he replied:

"Why, yes; if it's as funny as all that."

"It's funny, all right," said David, still chuckling. "You'll like to die laffin' when you hear it. Y'see, it was this way:

"In a certain small town in Kansas—or mebbe it was Arkansas—they was jest about to hold a county election. Well,

the most important office to be filled was county clerk—or mebbe it was prosecutor—an' everybuddy was on pins an' needles, wonderin' who was goin' to be elected to that office.

"Now, in that there town they had a big political boss, an' he wanted a certain man—we'll jest call him Jones—to git that office, b'cause he held a kinder mortgage on the man's soul. Well, jest b'fore the election, things didn't look so durn bright for that there political boss and Jones. It looked like as if they was goin' to git licked by a couple o' votes, an' they was all up in the air about it. So what did they go an' do but cook up a leetle trick that was a world-beater.

"This here political boss was a smart feller, even if he was crooked 'n a corkscrew. He knew the laws backward and forward, an' he picks out one leetle law that he knew was goin' to save the day fer him. He knew that if a voter's full name and the name of his county was left off 'n the poll-book when he registered, why his vote couldn't be counted. He knew that, all right; but the trouble was how he could git those names off 'n the poll-book.

"Y'see, this was jest b'fore election day, an' of course, registration was all done with, an' what's more, it 'd all been done perfectly straight an' accordin' to the laws. Now, of course, he knew a lot o' people who would vote against his man sure as fate, an' he knew that if he could make the names of some o' them look irreg'lar on the book, his man 'd win, hands down. You foller me, don't you, Noah?"

The prosecuting attorney gave several quick, short nods. He was sitting forward in his chair, his body tense with fearful interest, his face grown suddenly as white as the sheets of foolscap that lay on the desk before him.

"We ain't got to the funny part yet," went on David, never glancing at the man opposite him. "Wait till you hear how they went an' got those names off 'n the poll-book! They talked it over together—this here political boss an' his man, Jones—an' they decided that the only way it could be done was to *change* the real book fer a *fake* one.

"So they git a copy of all the voters that registered, an' they git a blank poll-book, an' they make a duplicate poll-book, jest like the real one, *exceptin'* they make about sixty—or mebbe sixty-six—names look irreg'lar, accordin' to that law I was tellin' you of. An' they was slick enough, mind you, to change a few o' their *own* men, so's they'd git cast out along with a bunch o' the other party's voters; b'cause that 'd do away with any suspicions that might arise. They felt that they could afford to lose, say, twelve votes, if the other feller lost fifty-four.

"Well, the night b'fore election, this here Jones breaks into the pollin'-place an' changes the books; an' that's how he gets elected."

He paused, his shoulders shaking with his silent laughter as he regarded the ash of his cigar. "Ain't that a funny one, Noah? Some slick, eh?"

For a while Spigot made no reply. *Now* he realized the object of David's visit. David *knew*! Somehow, the station-master had disclosed the secret that he had thought to be shared only by Turner and himself, the dark secret that would bring about his ruin—nay, take from him his very liberty—were it divulged! How much did David know? Did he have proofs of this accusation which he so subtly worded? Or was it merely founded upon the *suspensions* of this old man?

A sudden trembling seized him, and he held his hands below the level of the tabletop so that David should not perceive his fright. He struggled, with all his will, to cover every visible trace of his nervousness. David might have told that impersonal story for the very purpose of drawing him out, of making him commit himself! David was playing a game; and he must play it with him.

"Where did you hear that story, David?" he asked, forcing his lips into a wry smile. "That didn't—really happen, did it?"

"Probably not," said David. "It's jest a leetle story I happened to know, an' I thought mebbe you'd enjoy hearin' it. In fact, I consider that there story so *durn* funny that I ain't never told it to a livin'

soul up to now. What seems to tickle me is how slick that there political boss was, lettin' his man, Jones, do all the dirty work, so *he* couldn't possibly be implicated hisself.

"Accordin' to the story, he lets Jones do the forgin' an' changin' the books by breakin' into the pollin'-place. He don't do nothin' hisself, exceptin' to tell Jones what to do. An' Jones gits hisself liable to arrest fer forgery, an' also fer breakin' into an' enterin' an' burglary! That's what I call slick! An' another funny thing is how funny that Jones feller must 'a' looked when he climbed through th' winder o' the pollin'-place, night b'fore election.

"That's how I do," went on David in his drawling voice: "I got such a good imagination that when I hear a story, I kin jest picture to myself how ever'thin' must 'a' looked. Now, we'll say, jest fer fun, that it was a moonlight night. Here comes that there Jones feller sneakin' down the street, dodgin' in the shaders till he reaches the pollin'-place, which might be a drug-store—or mebbe it could be a barber-shop or somethin'. Can't you jest see him, Noah, runnin' along there with the fake poll-book under his coat—an' a white envelope slippin' from his pocket a leetle bit with each step he takes?

"An' there, sneakin' along b'hind him—though he don't know it—comes another feller, watchin' ever'thin' Jones does! That second feller sees Jones drop that there white envelope out'n his pocket, an' so he jest picks it up an' puts it in *his* pocket. He don't read it then, 'cause he's too busy watchin' at a side winder, an' seein' Jones change the poll-books.

"But when he gits home he reads it. Gol darn it, that could be a funny letter jest as well as not, couldn't it? Who knows but what it was a letter from that there political boss to Jones—unsigned, of course, so's *he* wouldn't have nothin' against him!—tellin' Jones that he had looked over the fake book Jones had made, an' found it all right, an' tellin' Jones the best time to do the changin'—an' havin' a postscript, too, tellin' Jones to *burn up* that letter!

"Right there could be the funniest part o' the whole story. B'cause Jones is so

excited that he don't burn up the letter right away like the political boss told him to, but stuffs it in his pocket, instead. An' then, the next day, Jones can't tell fer the life o' him whether he burnt that there letter or not. All he knows is that it's gone—an' he don't know that somebuddy's got it put away safe enough! Now, wouldn't that be funny?"

"That *would* be funny," said Spigot; the twisted smile still stamped on his cold, blue lips.

David looked at the prosecutor. It was the first time since he had begun his story that he had directed his gaze toward his listener. Although he was laughing, his blue eyes were like a frozen lake.

"You look kinder hot, Noah. You're sweatin'."

"It is a bit warm," Spigot replied, taking out a handkerchief and mopping his streaming face.

"Ye-es," drawled David. "I thought that there story might make you a leetle warm.

"Stories like that sometimes do. When you're overworked the way you are here, Noah, it don't take much to exert you. That's why I say you ought to resign an' take a rest."

• For a moment Spigot met the station-master's gaze; and then, of a sudden, his tense nerves snapped. The terrific strain put upon them by this quiet game had become too great. He sprang to his feet and stood swaying, inarticulate a moment, before he found voice. Then:

"You—you blackmailer!" he cried huskily, leaning across the table toward the serene station-master. "You dirty, sly blackmailer! You can't threaten me! You can't chase *me* out of office! You never found any—you haven't got a—a—"

"Why, Noah!" David interrupted, his face a perfect study in surprise and wonderment. "What in tarnation's got-into you? You do act as if you're guilty o' somethin' *yerself*. Durned if you don't!"

Spigot dropped back into his chair, slumping down in it, his haggard face buried in his shaking hands.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned.

"Why, you're jest a wreck, Noah,"

David continued quietly. "Sure enough, you need a good rest. What you want to do is resign from this here prosecutor's office *to-night*. If you don't, you might have to take a rest fer a year or two in kind of a sanatorium—not exactly a sanatorium, y'know, but kind of a one, only with stricter rules than some. That wouldn't be near so nice as handin' in your own resignation, sayin' as how you have to give up your office b'cause you're about to move to some other town before very long.

"B'cause, if I ain't mistaken, Noah, you're goin' to move from Selma jest as quick as you kin git your affairs straightened out. An' I don't think I'm much mistaken."

Spigot dropped his hands to his knees, his head fallen forward to his heaving chest, as if this stroke of disaster had severed every ligament in his neck. David rose slowly to his feet, looking down upon the broken man.

"I guess I'll be goin', Noah. You'll be wantin' to think things over a while an' then write out that resignation, so's it can be handed in to-night. B'sides, you got one leetle thing to attend to b'fore you go out'n office, Noah. You want to withdraw that there charge against young Boom an' order his release. Jest as I told you when I fust came in, I understood you was thinkin' o' doin' that b'fore you resigned. Y'see, he's innercent, as you know, an' you don't like to see him locked up thataways."

He started to the door, but halted midway, as if he recalled an almost forgotten detail.

"By the way, Noah, after you've handed in your resignation an' have withdrawn them charges against Boom, drop in at the station an' see me. I got a letter there I want to give you. 'Tain't of much importance, I reckon, but you might like to have it. So as not to put yourself out, you kin jest call fer it when you're at the station to take the train fer wherever you're goin'. An' as fer that there story I told you, why, don't pass it on to nobuddy else; b'cause other folks mightn't see the joke of it, like you an' me did. Well, s'long, Noah."

And a moment later the office door had closed behind him.

CHAPTER XIX.

AMOS MAKES A BREAK.

"BERT!"
With a bound Fred was out of his chair and across the office, shaking Bert's hand joyously.

"Bert! How did you get out?"

Bert shook his head wonderingly. "Darned if I know, Fred! All I know is that Warren came down to my—cell, a while ago and told me that I was free and that all charges against me were withdrawn. And here I am."

"And how glad I am to see you!" cried Fred, laughing from sheer happiness. "Why, I've been worried sick about you, old man. I thought they had you framed up so that you'd never get out of it!"

"So did I," Bert admitted. "I was scared, if you want to know it. Why, with Turner controllin' everything, even the judge to try me; what chance would I have? Ugh! Two days in a cell is enough for me. I wonder why they let me out?"

"It's got me," said Fred. "And another strange thing just happened. I just heard that Spigot has handed in his resignation!"

"No!"

"Absolutely. Any fool could see that his resignin' and your release are connected some way. But how, I can't imagine. Maybe Spigot and Turner split up."

"Maybe," Bert replied. "It's a cinch that Turner didn't want me to get out. Do you know the whole story, Fred? How he worked out a chain of evidence against me a mile long? And—"

"I know all about it," said Fred. "I wrote it up in *The Punch* last night, and I didn't mince my words either. I said, plain out, that it was a dirty frame-up. I don't believe that there are a dozen people in Selma who believe that you're guilty."

"Good old Freddy!"

"What gets me," mused Fred, "is why

Spigot resigned. Why, he was the cornerstone—the foundation—of Turner's power here. It's got me!"

After supper, the young men repaired to Bert's room, for there was an inexhaustible supply of subject matter for their conversation. Bert's unexpected release seemed inexplicable. Spigot's resignation was even more mystifying. They abandoned the idea of a quarrel between Turner and the prosecutor, for they learned at the suppertable—whose guests spoke of nothing else but of these all-important topics—that Turner had been as surprised as any one else at the news of Spigot's actions.

"Why, I tol' it to him fust, myself," said Josh Hartley. "He like to fell off 'n his cheer right there in his office. Why, when I tol' him that Spigot had resigned an' you was out'n jail, Boom, Turner got red an' white an' then red again. 'My God!' he says—jest like that—as if somebuddy had 'a' hit him one in the face, suddenlike. An' then, fust thing you know, he was out'n his office like a streak o' greased lightnin', an' hittin' the trail fer the City Hall. I tell you—"

"I hear that Spigot's goin' to leave town," some one broke in. "Selectman Diggers, who was one of them that got the resignation, told me. He says that's why Spigot said he was resignin'. Leavin' town, he says. Sörter sudden like, it seems to me. Humph! Pass me that plate o' meat, will you, please?"

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Belden, who was the better half of Ezra, the proprietor of the Palace, and who officiated as high priestess at table. "Well, I jest never, that's all! Sech goin's on in this town since you come, Mr. Bing, Bang, Boom! Never a quiet minute no more. Pass Mr. Boom some more o' them potaters, Mr. Hartley. Reckon they don't keep a table like this'n at th' jail, eh, Mr. Boom? Such goin's on! I never in all my life!"

"I don't know much about this here affair," put in Ezra. "I only know what I heard, that's all. But Jennie Newhouse told me that she seen David Hodge go into Spigot's office this very afternoon. Of course, I can't say fer positive, but that's what she told me. An' what's more, she

told me that he was there a long time. Now it seems funny to me how David Hodge should be in that office jest before all these things happened. He's a queer critter, David Hodge is, an' it's jest such as him who kin do queer things. Of course I don't know much about—"

"By gosh!" Mr. Hartley gave the table a resounding whack with his palm, setting the dishes to quivering. "I met David Hodge myself jest afore he went into the city hall. An' do you know what he says to me? He says: 'Hello, Josh,' an' I says: 'Hello,' and he says: 'Heard anythin' about Attorney Spigot resignin' from office?' an' I says: 'No, did you?' an' he says: 'Well, I'm listenin' hard,' an' I says: 'What do you mean?' an' he says: 'Jest try an' listen' yerself about six o'clock to-night'—and with that he walks away. I never thought no more about it then, 'cause I allus did think the man was clean crazy. But, sure 'nough, come six o'clock, I heard! Now, what I want to know is, how did he know then?"

Later, when Fred and Bert were alone, they discussed this phase of the problem.

"I'm inclined to believe there's something in that story about David," said Bert. "Lord knows what he could do to get me out, or to make Spigot quit, but—"

Fred laughed the suggestion to scorn. "That's too ridiculous to think about, Bert. It's all right for that bunch of magpies down-stairs, but it's impossible. What influence could David have? As for him telling Hartley about it early in the afternoon, why, he just got the tip before the rest, that's all. Leave it to David to find out things."

"But what would he go to see Spigot for?" argued Bert. "He's no friend of his, that I know of."

"Maybe he didn't," Fred replied. "Don't believe everything you hear. They talk to hear themselves talking."

But Bert could not shake off the growing belief that, somehow, David was responsible for his sudden liberty. Long after Fred had departed, he lay abed thinking of the station-master. He recalled every word that had passed between them; he reviewed the drive that he had taken with

him, the night of the Chamber of Commerce dance. He thought of it all; but when he tried to gather up these threads of premises and weave them together into the pattern of some logical conclusion, they tangled and knotted and became but a snarl of strands.

The next morning he met David on the street.

"Well!" David greeted. "I thought you was in jail."

"You know you didn't think that," Bert replied, studying the man's face. "You must have heard that I got out yesterday."

"Yes," said David. "A lot o' folks told me you got out. That's why I thought you was still in."

"David," said Bert seriously, "will you answer me a question?"

David grunted. "Why, of course, I'll answer it. The only pusson who won't answer a question is a woman, an' when she don't, it means 'yes.' A man allus answers a question some way. What you mean is, will I answer it truthful?"

"That's what I mean. Will you?"

"It depends," said David. "What's the question?"

"I want to know if you had anything to do with my getting out of jail. Did you?"

David chuckled. "Durned if you don't ask that like as if you was sayin' somethin' original! You're the twelfth pusson to ask me that since last night."

"I heard things, too," said Bert. "That's what makes me wonder. But you haven't answered my question."

"So I didn't," said David. "Well, I did an' I didn't."

"Then you did get me out!" cried Bert. "You—"

"Now hold on," interrupted David. "You mustn't go jumpin' at conclusions. Arrivin' at conclusions is like huntin' ducks. If you don't lie quiet till they get kinder settled, but jump out at 'em, you'll find they ain't nothin' there but wooden decoys. Now I said I did an' I didn't. All you're interested in is the did. Here's why I say I did:

"About thirteen years ago, when they was raisin' funds to build that city hall, they come to me an' I give 'em some money

to help out. I had money in them days, son. Anyway, how I figger it is that if I gave 'em money to build that buildin'—an' the jail's in that buildin'—an' you were put in that jail, why, I helped you git out. B'cause, if there hadn't been no jail to put you into, you couldn't never have gotten out'n it. Of course, it's sorter round about, an' that's why I say I did an' I didn't."

For a moment, Bert's disappointment kept him silent. He looked at the station-master reproachfully, and David returned the gaze, his face quite serious, but his eyes twinkling.

"Well, son, now that that's answered to your satisfaction, I guess you'll feel better. You had to give up your idear fer the Majestic, didn't you?"

Bert realized the futility of trying to gain further information from David, and he accepted the latter's change of topic. He nodded.

"Got any new notions fer it?" David asked.

"Not a thing," Bert replied gloomily. "It seems that Turner killed the only worth while scheme there is."

"Ye-es. But Turner jest saved it the trouble o' killin' itself, it seems to me."

"Why? Don't you think the idea was any good?"

"Oh, the idear was all right," David replied. "But the trouble is that it wouldn't 'a' worked. Reminds me of a feller I knew once. He come to me with a lot o' drawin's with figgers all over it. I asked him what 'twas, an' he tells me it's a new invention o' his—a perpetual-motion machine. He explains all o' them figgers an' things, an' when he gits through, I says: 'That there's a wonderful machine,' I says. 'Are you sure it 'll work?' 'Course it won't work,' he says. 'There ain't never was a perpetual-motion machine invented that would. But this here's a durn good invention, anyways.'"

"How do you know my plan wouldn't have been successful?" said Bert testily. "It would have been wonderful, if—"

"I know," put in David. "Guess I oughtn't to go an' say nothin' against it, now. A dead idear's jest like a dead man. If everybuddy lived up to the good things

folks say about him when he's dead, this world 'd be a Paradise right enough! The only way to really leave a bad name b'hind you is to die on the gallows. An' then some folks 'd say: 'He died brave!'"

He paused. "Well, son, I'd better be movin' along. I'm glad to see you're out'n that jail, anyways. Now that you're in the market fer attractions agin, you can't afford to be in a cell. That's one place attractions won't be in, even if they do stay around railroad stations an' things."

"David," cried Bert, "that's the second time you've said that. Do you mean—"

"Son," said David, "d'you know it ain't onusual fer a man to hunt high an' low fer his spectacles an' then find 'em on his forehead? An' usually it takes somebuddy else to tell him they're there. So-long, son." And he turned abruptly and walked casually away.

For a moment, Bert stared after him, but this time there was no wonderment depicted in his face. Despite the utter irrelevancy of the station-master's remark, Bert found it easy of interpretation.

"But if he knows something to help me with the Majestic," he pondered, "why the deuce doesn't he tell me?"

He walked back to the Palace, and as he entered the lobby he met Amos, who was crossing to the desk with a suit-case. At sight of Bert, Amos paused midway in his shuffling walk and stared at him with his eyes wide and his lips parted.

"Hello, kid," said Bert. "What's the matter? Did I forget to put on a collar?"

"Gosh!" the youth exploded, still staring. "Jiminy Christmus! I thought yer was a dead corpse!"

"What?" said Bert, puzzled. "What did you think I was?"

"A dead corpse," Amos repeated. "I heard that there Ellis Turner say jest a coupla minits ago that yer was."

Bert scratched his ear. "Ellis Turner told you that I was dead?"

Amos looked about him cautiously, and finding the lobby deserted, save for the two of them, he thought it to be a propitious time to hold his first conversation with Bert, whom he had long held in an esteem that bordered closely upon awe.

"He didn't tell me," said Amos in a husky voice, "but I heard him tell it to Ruth Warren. I was jest comin' up Main Street with this here valise, an' I seen him an' her standin' talkin'. Well, I jest sorter rode up close to where they was an' I heard Turner say that he had yer by the throat even if yer did git outer jail, an' that yer was a dead one now, anyways. Gee, I thought sure yer was a dead corpse!"

"Did—did you hear Miss Warren say anything?" ventured Bert.

"She didn't say nothin'," Amos replied. "She jest turned her back on him an' went inter Blackton's shoe store. But she got red."

"Ummmm!" said Bert, trying to appear unconcerned. "You're the boy who works for the station-master, aren't you?"

Amos nodded. "Yeh. That's how I come to be up here with this here valise. A man come in on th' local this mornin' an' hired me to carry this here valise up here fer him."

Bert laughed. "Well, kiddo, I hope you feel better, now that you know that I'm a dead one only figuratively speaking."

"It wouldn't be no surprise ter me if that there Turner did do fer yer," said Amos in defense of his former fears. "He like ter done fer me once, aw right, an' he like ter done fer you, too, that time when he took that there Paprika Blake up to the dance ter lick yer."

Bert started. "What do you mean?"

Amos swallowed hard. He realized all at once that he had forgotten the rule of reticence that David Hodge had taught him; that he had, indeed, talked more than he should.

"I—I guess I gotter be goin'," he remarked, leaving the suit-case in the center of the lobby, and starting back toward the door.

But with a leap, Bert was at his side, laying hold of his arm.

"Wait just a minute, kiddo," said Bert. "I'd like you to tell me what you meant by saying that—"

"I didn't mean nothin'," replied Amos, nervously shifting his weight from foot to foot and avoiding Bert's eyes. "Honest Injun, I never."

Bert regarded the fidgeting youth, and nodded his head wisely. He had suddenly connected the boy's vague statement with his strange ride with David Hodge the night of the Chamber of Commerce dance. The boy knew something, he decided, and he was going to find out definitely what it was.

"What's your name, kiddo?" he asked kindly.

"Amos," returned the other. "Honest Injun, I never meant nothin'."

"Well, Amos," said Bert. "You and I are going up to my room and have a little talk. I believe that you have something to tell me, and you may be able to help me a lot by telling it. Come on."

Amos hung back. "Gosh! I ain't got nothin' ter tell. I gotter git back to work."

"Come on," said Bert, aiding the boy's lagging steps by a firm grip of his arm, fairly dragging him toward the stairway. "I believe you're a friend in need, Amos."

A half-hour later, Bert let Amos out of his room into the still corridor.

"Yer know what 'll happen ter me if he finds out I told yer," Amos whispered. "He'll do fer me sure. He don't know I told David, even, an' if he did, he'd—"

"Don't let it worry yer, Amos," assured Bert. "That threat of Turner's was only to frighten you, so that you'd keep your mouth shut. But I won't bring you into this at all. I'll wait up here for a while, until you're on your way back to the station, so no one will know you and I were together this morning. Now run along, and don't tell any one you spoke to me."

Left alone, Bert mentally recapitulated the information that Amos had given him. The boy's story cleared up many matters about which Bert had often wondered: why David Hodge had kept him from attending the dance; how Turner had been able to gain entrance into the room at the Majestic in which Paprika had taken refuge, and why he had gone to the extreme of killing the fugitive.

When he dashed from his room a few minutes later, he had formed no definite plan of action. He only knew that he wanted to confront Turner with his accusations; to show him that he, Bert, was not

yet a "dead one," but an opponent to be reckoned with.

As he emerged from the Palace, he saw Ruth Warren walking on the other side of the street. He crossed to her, approaching her so suddenly that she looked up into his flushed face with startled eyes.

"I won't bother you but a minute, Miss Warren," he said, standing before her. "I have something very important to ask you."

"Certainly, Mr. Boom," she replied, equaling his distant civility. "What is it?"

"What I want to know is—did you see Ellis Turner at the Chamber of Commerce dance?"

"Why—yes."

"Was any one with him?"

"He was with that man you—saved me from later," she replied. "He introduced him to me as a Mr. Blake, a business associate from—Texas, I believe."

"Thank you," he said, turning, as if about to leave. Then he paused and faced her again. "Miss Warren," he said quietly, but with that marked suppression that revealed the anger that flared within him at this certain corroboration of Amos's story, "I know that Turner told you this morning that he had me licked. He hasn't. You just confirmed something that I heard recently—and I'm going to break Turner with it—right now! When I get through with him I'll have done the first of the three things I told you I was going to do. You remember what I told you that morning on Majestic Road?"

A flush mounted to her cheeks, but she made no reply.

"I told you," he went on, "that I was going to beat Turner, and revive the Majestic, and—and that I was going to make you like me. Well, I suppose the last is impossible—now, but the first two aren't, despite Turner's boast!"

She looked at him in wondering amazement.

"I—I don't know—what you mean? Why are you telling me this—"

"I wanted you to know that I'm not beaten—entirely," he replied. "That's all."

He turned and left her abruptly, striding away up the street to disappear a moment later into the Turner building. Nourished by the destruction of his cherished plans for the Majestic, by his false arrest and imprisonment, by Amos's story of Turner's cowardly "frame-up" against him, his rage was like a living, clawing thing inside of him. Before he had spoken with Ruth, he had been striving to keep his temper in check, to act coolly and with judgment.

But now, as he ran up the steps to Turner's office, he was possessed of but one idea. He was going to do to Turner what Turner had planned to have done to him: he was going to give Ellis Turner the thrashing of his life!

Without knocking, he threw back the door of Turner's office, and stepped inside. A glance told him that the office was empty. As he retraced his steps to the stairway, doubtful where to seek his enemy, he met a man who was employed in the bank that occupied the ground floor of the building.

"Have you any idea where I might find Mr. Turner?" Bert asked him.

"He's out on Prospect Hill," the man replied. "Him an' some surveyors. They're goin' to break ground fer the power-house this mornin'."

"Thanks," said Bert; and a moment later he was down the steps and running back to the Palace Hotel, in front of which he had left his horse and buggy.

Ruth was still standing on the other side of the street where he had left her; but Bert did not seem to see her as he climbed into his buggy and drove hurriedly in the direction of the Majestic Hotel.

Ruth watched him until he disappeared up the street. Instinctively, she realized what were Bert's intentions. She knew that Bert had entered the Turner Building to seek Turner, and that, not finding him, he was going to where he could be found—on Prospect Hill.

Not questioning the why or wherefore of her actions, she walked to where her own horse and buggy were standing and climbed to the seat.

"He—he's mad!" she murmured as she

drove away toward the city hall where her father had his office. "He—he's liable to do anything!"

CHAPTER XX.

TURNER MAKES SOME PLANS.

THE source of a rumor is difficult to determine, its course as rapid as that of flames on oil-soaked batting. With the sudden quashing of the indictment against Bert and his liberation from jail; with the inexplicable resignation of Noah Spigot as prosecuting attorney of Grant County and his immediate departure from Selma for parts unknown, Selma found ample food for conversation and speculation; and it was not long before the whispered phrase, "crooked elections," found its way into these conversations and speculations; and, simultaneously, Ellis Turner began to be looked upon askance.

Of course the good people of Selma knew nothing definite. Whoever had let loose the suggestion that implied "crooked elections" and linked to it the name of Ellis Turner was evidently a keen student of psychology; for its very vagueness added to its potency, and what was not known was easily imagined, giving to it an added charm of personal deduction.

It was fed, too, morsel by morsel, from the plentiful cornucopia of its unknown sponser; and, with this wholesome nourishment, it grew with the rapidity of a maggot.

Within a very few hours people began to wonder about matters to which they had not, previously, given a second thought. They wondered why certain names had been irregularly entered upon the poll-book at the last election; and why Turner had been seen at the dance in the company of a rogue like Paprika; and why the latter had met such a tragic fate at the hands of Turner. They wondered and wondered, and narrowed their eyes and nodded their heads sagely while they were so occupied, as they whose perception begins to pierce a misty veil, disclosing that which lies behind it. And certain gentlemen of the board of selectmen, shifting uncomfortably

in their exalted seats, began to do a bit of wondering themselves.

Spigot's resignation was quite as inexplicable to Ellis Turner as to the others, and, moreover, it was destined to remain a mystery to him; for Spigot had successfully evaded an interview with him before he slipped quietly out of town.

Turner realized, of course, that something was in the wind. With the removal of this important pillar, as represented by the prosecutor, the entire structure of political power which he had erected sagged perilously and threatened collapse; for, should the sheriff and the board of selectmen become seized with panic and follow the example of Spigot, the structure would collapse and bury him beneath its débris.

Turner rose to the emergency with his customary quickness of action. He immediately sought out President Cass Bidwell, of the board of selectmen, who, now that Spigot was gone, was his most valuable henchman.

"Cass," said Turner, "you are the man to whom Spigot handed his resignation this evening. Did he give you his real reason for quitting? I haven't been able to see him. The sneaking rat won't let me get at him."

Bidwell shook his head.

"I couldn't get anything out of him, Ellis. He jest comes across the hall to my office and hands me his written resignation. 'I'm resigning,' he says. 'I'm leaving town to-night or to-morrow morning.' Naturally, I like to fell off my chair. 'What for?' I says to him. 'It's my health,' he says. 'I've got to go away at once.'

"You know as well as me, Ellis, he never had a sick day as long as we've known him. But jest then, he sure looked sick as a dog. But o' course I didn't believe that was the reason he was quitting all of a sudden, and leaving town. I knew something was wrong. But I couldn't get a word out of him. He jest walked out of my office, and I ain't seen him since."

Turner was silent a moment, his gray eyes like steel points.

"Cold feet," he pronounced finally. "A clear case of cold feet. Somebody—undoubtedly Patterson or Boom—has started

some whispering about that special election last September, and Spigot got scared. He always was a white-livered rat—like Warren."

"People are beginning to talk," Bidwell stated. "I never saw anything like it. It got around almost as soon as the news that Spigot quit. The members of the board heard things even before I called a meeting a few hours ago to read 'em the resignation; and after the meeting several of 'em, confidential like, asked me things—about you!"

"That's what I was afraid of," said Turner, tightening his lips. "We've got to keep that bunch from running away before I can get things smoothed over. I've got Warren roped hand and foot; I'm not afraid of him bolting—unless the others do. It's up to you, Cass, to see to it that they don't."

"They won't if I can help it," said Bidwell simply.

The two men looked at each other with understanding. Of all the men whom Turner had bound to him, Bidwell alone did not serve him through fear. When Turner had picked him up, eight years ago, he had been a mere farm-hand, big boned, rough, but with a keen mind that was admirably suited to Turner's purposes. Turner had "made" him, and he was deeply grateful.

"That's the idea," said Turner thoughtfully. "Keep them quieted down, and everything will blow over all right. It's up to the Governor now to appoint a new prosecutor to finish out Spigot's term. He'll appoint a man on the recommendation of the board. The man we need in there is a fellow like Dan Newbury, that shyster lawyer of Yellow Springs. As soon as we can put through his appointment, we'll be back to where we were before Spigot quit. See?"

Bidwell nodded. "I'll call a meeting to-morrow night."

"That's right. Put it through as quickly as possible."

"How about that fellow, Boom?" asked Bidwell. "He's a hell of a lot of trouble—and hard to get rid of."

Turner's lips curled.

"Leave him to me," he replied meaningly. "He's a lot of trouble—but he hasn't

any sting. He's like a fly: he worries you a lot, but he can't really hurt you. When I get that power-house built, his hotel won't be worth a damn. We begin work on that first thing to-morrow, and we'll rush it through. All he can do now is talk, and when we get Newbury in there, I'll soon stop that.

"In the meanwhile we've got to keep these scared rats of yours from scampering to the four winds. That's up to you. You've got to keep up their confidence in me, and keep them believing that I'm high Jack and game."

Bidwell smiled. "You are," he said admiringly.

"Make them believe it, anyway," repeated Turner. "I'll tell you what you do," he added suddenly. "Get the board together about noon to-morrow and bring the bunch out to the power-house site. I'll be out there with some surveyors, laying out the ground. Showing them the power-house actually getting under way ought to help a lot; and besides, it 'll keep them from hearing too much and talking too much."

"Not a bad idea," Bidwell agreed. "We'll make a little ceremony of it. I'll give a speech, and we'll let each one of the damn fools turn a shovelful o' dirt. I'll bring 'em out about eleven."

At the edge of the clearing on Prospect Hill, Bert drew rein and looked about him. In the field that adjoined his own property, he saw eight or ten men at work, several with surveyors' instruments, others with mallets, pegs and wire tape; and his searching eyes soon picked out Turner, who was standing off to one side, watching the men at their tasks.

He left his buggy and strode swiftly toward the man he was seeking, lightly vaulting the low fence that separated his land from Turner's. At his approach, Turner looked up quickly, and the momentary frown of wonderment gave way at once to the bland smile that was Turner's ever-ready mask.

"Good morning, Boom," he greeted.

"Did you come out to see the power-house get under way?"

His tone as well as his words was mocking. Bert could scarcely refrain from proceeding with the pleasurable business of pummelling that derisive smile from the man's face while he made those preliminary remarks that he thought to be consistent with fair play.

"Turner," said Bert, getting at once to the point. "I just found out that you brought that fellow Blake to the Chamber of Commerce dance last month, and I also found out what you brought him up there for."

Turner started slightly, but though his eyes narrowed calculatingly as he watched his accuser, the smile did not leave his lips. An instant was all he required to gain full cognizance of the situation. Some one, he decided, had told Bert the truth about Paprika. Besides himself, there were but three persons who knew the truth, and one of them—Paprika—was dead. He eliminated the sheriff, too; for he had recently whispered something into Warren's ear that had put fear into his heart.

Bert's informer, then, must have been the boy, Amos, whom he had discovered eavesdropping outside his office door. He recalled having seen the youth ride past him that morning and, later, go into the Palace Hotel, where he had remained an unusually long time.

The fact that Bert knew of his dealings with Paprika gave him no concern. In Selma he enjoyed an immunity from the law that was almost exterritorial. But there was that in the young man's eyes that told him that Bert did not intend to have recourse to the law. In fact, he did not need perception to arrive at that conclusion; for Bert immediately made plain to him what his intentions were.

"I came out here to thrash you for it, Turner," said Bert evenly. "I've been aching to do it ever since I came to Selma, and now I'm going to give you the licking of your life. Take off your coat if you want to, because I'm going to begin in less than half a minute."

This story will be concluded in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.



A Portrait of Hope

By P. A. Price

I CLAIMS you takes chances; sometimes you makes a getaway, and again you gets gypped. I ain't a saying that we shouldn't help a friend if he's in bad, but always have your getaway framed and a piece of fall money in your kick, for you never knows just how things is going to break.

But when I restores Hooch to his girl and his friends I does something I never regrets. Hooch ain't made for yegging no more than I am for sitting in at a church sociable. As Tommy the Yegg expresses it, we are all "creatures of our environment," which means, he says, that if you're used to table linen with your eats you never gets used to oilcloth. I don't see no use in being too finicky, though I admits to sleeping better on the floor of a box-car than in a regular bed.

Hooch joins on with us at Roodhouse, Illinois. There was only three of us in the mob at the time; Tommy the Yegg, New Castle Slim, and me. He comes on us in the jungles, where we was waiting for a 'diser' to come through, which we figures on holding down into K. C., and was a trying to get a nap so as to be in shape for an all-night ramble on the rat-
tler.

We was just about asleep when this fellow I'm telling you about drops in on us and sits down alongside of Slim. We ain't none too sociable with strangers for you never knows who you're mixing with. This "entertaining angels unawares" stuff is all

right, but it's more apt to be an elbow looking for a pinch. As I says, we're careful, and this guy being so free and easylike, kind of makes us leary.

Slim sits up and gives him the up and down. "Which way, 'bo?" he asks him.

"Do you mean which way am I going?" says our visitor.

"Just that," says Slim, "and as it's getting on toward evening, I suggests you keep moving!" and Slim stands up, the guy still sitting there cool and calm.

He looks at Slim easylike, and says: "I was thinking I might be invited to join on with this little party, the destination and mode of travel being immaterial!"

This was a new kind of a deal to us and we looks to Tommy for dope on future activities, Tommy being able to make a lot of stuff that's too deep for us. So Tommy gets up and comes over to the gink, who maybe sees trouble ahead, for he stands up, too.

"What's the big idea?" says Tommy. "Is it regular for a guy to horn his way into a crowd and invite the attention of an assemblage as you have done? Do you know," says Tommy, as he frisks the guy's coat-pockets, "that it's contrary to all rules of etiket"—and here he frisks the gink's vest-pockets—"for a gentlemān to invite himself"—here he makes a pass to see if the gazabo has a gat—"into the sacred and inviolate precincts of a gentleman's gathering place"—here he feels him over for a shiv—"without the formality of an

introduction? I'm asking you," says Tommy, as he inspects the junk he's lifted off the lob.

The guy grins. He's a big mutt, and Tommy should have known better. "Well," says he, still grinning, "I admits"—and here he lands a punch in Tommy's slats—"that a breach of etiket has been committed"—and here he hands Tommy a drive in the pantry—"but I considered the gathering to be rather informal"—and he plants one in Tommy's eye—"and that good people don't need an introduction, nohow," and with this he puts our little friend down and out with what looks like an easy one on the point of the jaw.

It was all over in a pair of minutes, but Tommy takes the full count and then some, and when he come to he wants to know if the engine hit him or if it was the caboose. "It was an awful wreck," says Tommy, trying to sit up, "the cries of the dead and wounded was heart-rending," says Tommy, and then he sees the guy kind of smiling as he rolls a pill.

"Did you say something about wanting to mingle with us?" says Tommy. The gink says he did. "You're elected," says Tommy. "I don't know who you are, or what you were, but you seem to be there with the rough stuff, and we need it from time to time. Slip us the makings," said Tommy, and after he's fixed up and has a wet rag to his lamp he shakes hands with the guy and gives him back his stuff, picking it off the ground where it went when the hay-maker was handed out.

There's something about the new fellow that makes you feel he's all right, and we all gets talking to him. He don't spill nothing about himself, and of course we don't ask no personal questions, though Slim wants to know if he's wise to what he's getting in to if he joins on.

"It ain't," says Slim, "as if our little jaunts hither and yon was entirely aimless. We is all possessed of a yearning for travel, and gratifies it in a manner which might appear crude and barbaric to those who have a yin for sinful luxury. The poet guy says: 'As we journey through life let us live by the way,' and in order to do that little thing we find it necessary to

raise a little kale now and again. And as the small-town banks sometimes carry a little cash on hand over and above what the directors loan to themselves for speculation, we often and frequent avails ourselves of this hoarded surplus when it's possible to do so without attracting undue attention."

"I appreciate the situation," says the new guy, "and though I regrets the fact that my early training did not include the detail and technique of safe-cracking I have always maintained that a man of ordinary intelligence may become proficient in many lines of endeavor to which he had previously given slight consideration. There are, no doubt, several and sundry features connected with this—er—industry with which I must become familiar, but I feels I have made no mistake in the selection of able instructors."

Say, to hear him and Slim and Tommy pulling that line of chatter you'd think they was all professors in some knowledge box, and all I can do is to give it to you the best I can, not being there with the flossy talk like I should. I don't know where Tommy and Slim gets it, for they're both blowed-in-the-glass stiffes, but they can sure pull the language in some swell manner.

Tommy wants to know if the new guy is wise to the patter of the broad highway. "You see," says Tommy, "sometimes you gets in with a bunch of hard-boiled eggs, and if your language shows lack of culture you might be mistook for a gay-cat, or even for a blanket-stiff. Of course your looks is a fair alibi, but it's best to avoid the appearances and mannerisms of those who are not all they should be. So now, when I asks you if you can batter the stoops for a handout, or could you frame a getaway if you was vagged on the main drag by a harness bull, I'm only a asking you to get a line on what you needs in the matter of education.

The new gink is awful willing to wise up, and it's a pleasure to teach him. He don't see no sense in some of the things we tells him, and I admits he's right at that, but if the proper name for a mush-faker is "mush-faker," and for white-line is "white-

line," there ain't no come-back; you takes it or you leaves it alone.

Slim explains the difference between a dookie, a poke-out, and a set-down.

"You see," says Slim, "you slams the gate and batters the stoop. Maybe it's a Jane answers the rap. You does the polite with the lid and pulls your spiel. Maybe she falls, maybe she don't. If she does fall, and passes out a row of eats wrapped up in a paper you gets what you calls a 'dookie.' If she's a good-natured doll, and you ain't made her leary of you she may pass out the scoffings on a platter, and you eats it on the porch and calls it a 'poke-out.'"

"But if she's an old lady and has a couple of boys the chances are you gets invited in, especially if you're dolled up a bit. Then you throws the feet under the mahogany and gets a 'set-down.' I usually gets set-downs," says Slim, "being popular with the ladies, and then I has to ask for a dookie for my less-fortunate companions," he says, pointing at Tommy and me.

"Once there was a guy who kept on hating himself like you do," says Tommy, "and he died from it. Have a care, you Pennsylvania snow-bird!" he says.

Before long we hears our rattler giving the yard whistle, so we lines up to glaum her, all of us decking a freezer and riding out on top through the marshes and swamps which stretch out between there and the old Mississippi. It was late when we got into Louisiana, midnight when we pulls into Mexico, and we goes into K. C. on a through string of Pullmans from St. Louis.

Them was the good old days in K. C.; the town being wide open and the bulls having no great care what you does unless there's too much of a squeal made to the higher-ups. But a boob's a boob, and there's always ways of making them get the right point of view. Slim and Tommy takes a hand at jack-rolling, it being fairly easy pickings and safe as all outdoors, but I never fancies that particular gift and preferring to use other means.

We gets a monicker for our new friend soon after landing. Not knowing if he likes his tea or not, Tommy asks him if he ever drinks anything.

"Not if I can get it down any other way," he says. "I've been foolish about my booze for some time," he says, "and it's to hooch I owes the pleasure of traveling with you jobbies." Tommy passes me the eye at that, for it's in line with how he frames the guy being on the road, and we calls him "Hooch" after that.

One day he asks me where the City Hospital is, and will I steer him up there. It seems he had a bad bruise on his head which he gets before joining on with us, and it ain't a healing up right. The young doc looks him over—and doesn't do any too much of a job at it—and boils it out with something or other, and-tells Hooch to climb on the wagon for a stretch and give it a chance to get well. Hooch says he will, and does stay sober for three or four days, and the cut heals up pretty good. I don't think nothing of it at the time, for any guy's liable to get a bump or two once in a while, especially if he's hitting freights.

Finally Tommy says it's time for us to drill, and we floats up to Omaha and out through Nebraska. Pickings is pretty good, and we don't have to hustle much to get along. Hooch is a big guy, and when he looms up in the doorway of a car with a gat in one mitt and his kelly in the other, most everybody gets the rumble and comes across pretty and fine.

But Hooch ain't bugs for the game. He don't know what fear is, and I've seen him take a shiv away from guys who would have gypped him in a minute with half a chance, but he's always kind of sad about it afterward.

"It ain't right," he tells us. "Those guys works hard for their bundle, and here we comes along and nicks them for the whole roll. It ain't right, I knows it ain't right," and then he passes his hand over his head like he was trying to brush something away.

Tommy and Slim and me never looks at it much that way. As I says before, if I don't get it some one else will. I gets trimmed often enough myself by some wiser gink than I am, and if they can trim me and get away with it it's my look-out; I should have been more hep to the plant.

Tommy always says it's a case of "the survival of the fittest," whatever that means.

But it ain't always happy days. More than once we gets vagged and does a stretch in some hoose-gow. Hooch is always on the job and going strong in such cases. Say, you'd think the big jobbie was a mouth-piece to hear him talk to the stiff. He pulls all kinds of chatter about haebus corpus, and writs, and pronouncements and a whole lot of bunk I never hears about, and as often as not we gets a cash bail and beats it out. Of course we always has money for such raps.

But we sure gets our bumps one day in a town in Kansas. It was along in the afternoon when we unloads, not aiming to stop off at all. But we gets ditched on a hot-box and there's nothing to do but hit the grit. As luck would have it there's a bunch of hicks hanging around the station and we don't see 'em till it's too late.

There's four of us, and about fifteen in the gang, all husky young fellows. We starts down the track the other way, but it don't do us no good.

"Hey! You bums, come up here!" they sings out, and throws a shot from a gat into the side of a car over our heads. We keeps on going, not saying a word, and another shot comes along, a little bit closer.

"We'd better stop," says Tommy, "but I don't like the looks of things." Hooch is for getting busy with our own gats, but Tommy says we'd only get in bad, worse than ever. Another shot comes our way, and I notices another and a bigger bunch of yaps coming up to meet us.

We stays where we are, and the two gangs come up, hooting and yelling and firing revolver shots in the air. In the lead is a big mutt and he strides up bold as brass.

"Don't you know we don't allow no tramps in this town?" he says, giving us the up and down. The gang gathers around pretty close.

I tells him we didn't aim to stop off, and we didn't know about the rule, and we wasn't tramps.

"What are you, then?" he says sarcasticlike: "Eastern tourists aiming to invest in Kansas real estate?"

"Let him rave," says Tommy, who shoots off his mouth too much at times. "We ain't a going to hurt your little town, and nobody 'd miss it if we took it with us!"

That was foolish stuff for Tommy to pull, and it made the gang mad. The ring-leader sputters around like a wet dog.

"Let's give 'em the run!" yells one of the yaps, and the whole crowd yells "Come on, boys! We'll give 'em the run!"

I gets a kind of cold feeling, and I notices Tommy and Slim don't look any too cheered up at the prospect. Hooch don't know what's coming and is putting up a good front. He starts to say something, but Tommy gives him the eye and he stops.

The leader of the bunch notices him then, and bellies up to him. "You got something to get off your mind, too?" he asks him, sneering up in Hooch's map. Hooch kind of smiles, sticks out his mit, and grabs the gink by the arm. I don't know just what he does, but Mr. Yap goes straight up in the air and comes down on his nob.

It was bum stunt number two, for the next minute Hooch gets beaned with a club and goes down and out. The rest of us tries to start something, but it's three of us now against about fifty, and we're laid out in no time.

The next thing we know the four of us is lined up in front of what goes by the name of the City Hall, and the gang was lined up in two rows, with every yap of them holding a club of some kind.

The big mutt comes up again, but he stays away from Hooch. "Now," he says, "you bums are going to get out of this town just as fast as you can, and we're going to help you on your way! One! Two! Three! Go!"

We went, running the only way there was to run, and that was down the line between the two rows of clubs, and every guy taking as many licks at us as he can. I won't go into details—you can size the thing up yourself, and you'll miss the cowardly cruelty of it at that. And these husky farmer boys are called "the backbone of the country!" Great doing for

them to boast about afterward. Sure, we had our gats; we could have croaked a dozen of the rats if we'd made a stand, but where would we get off? A necktie party inside of twenty-four hours, with "an outraged countryside", given a clean bill of health.

We didn't run much after we reached the end of the block; we was winded and pretty well battered up. Everybody seemed to know what had happened and we could see women and kids in the windows, looking out as we drags along. The kids laughed, but the women didn't; they had those cowards for sons and husbands, and it ain't no joke to live with men like that.

Down near the end of the main stem we turns a corner, and bumps into three girls standing in front of a house. We came on them so sudden they can't make a getaway and stands huddled up to the fence as we passes. They seems scared to death, for we were sure one hard-looking bunch. I guess we'd drilled past about fifty feet when I hears one of them calling to us.

"Mister," she says, "you men! Wait a minute!"

I looks around, and one of them was giving us the high-ball to back up. The other fellows hear her, and we goes back, none of us caring much what was to come next.

There was only two of the girls there when we gets back, the third one beating it out. Both of the two was crying, with their eyes full of tears, and they holds the gate open and leads us around to the back of the house, where there's a big porch with a lot of benches and cushions and things. The oldest of the two tells us to sit down, and she and the little kid goes into the house and comes out in a minute with an armful of towels and a big basin of water.

We just sat there, too much down and out to do anything, and say, what do you think? Those little women comes over to us and washes the blood off our heads and hands and doing it as gentlelike and kind as if we were kids.

We're too stupid, as I says, to do anything at first but just sit there panting, but the cold water and the gentle hands

of those little misses sure did feel good and freshened us up something wonderful. I never knew they made women like that before; I never had no folks, so I guess I've missed a lot.

When we're dolled up and rested a little the girls bring us big pitchers of milk and doughnuts and cookies and things, and we sure eats hearty till we can't hold no more.

The girls don't ask no questions; they just talk nice to us. Tommy starts to tell them how it happens, but the oldest says she knows and is sorry, but there's good people in the town as well as bad ones. Slim says yes, and there's angels, too, and she just smiles with the weeps in her eyes. Man, if there's any heaven like you hear of the Salvation Army touting up as a good bet it's sure full of women like those girls. They don't have many like 'em anywhere else.

I notices Hooch is awful quiet, not that he's a noisy guy at any time, but it seems he's hurt more than by just being beat up. I kind of figures he's sore at himself for getting in bad like this. He's different from us yeggs, even though he's as hard as any of us; he's had a bringing up of some kind and a education, and while he gets mad at being beat up, he feels what you call "hurt."

I can't just explain it, but any dick will tell you what I mean. If they're slipping a little rough stuff to a guy to make him squeal or come across, the regular gun takes it as a part of the game, but a guy who's innocent, or ain't a regular, takes it different.

Hooch keeps looking in the window facing on the porch, so I takes a slant to see what's on his mind. All I sees is a girl's picture laying on top of some ribbons and things on a table, but it's what Hooch is gazing at. He seems to be worried over the picture, keeps looking and passing his hand over his head like he was trying to bring something to his mind but can't cut it. A couple of times his face lights up like he gets a hunch about something, but it's just a flash and don't make him anything, and he gets more worried-looking than ever.

Finally he asks the girl if he can look

at the picture, and she brings it out to him. It's a photograph of a swell-looking lady, and across the bottom is written: "A Picture of Hope!" Hooch asks the girl where she got it, and she says her sister found it on the railroad track a few days before, it probably being lost by somebody out of a car window. She says Hooch can have it if he wants to, and it's a wonder to see the way his face lights up when she tells him it's his. He puts it in his pocket careful as can be, and we see there's tears in his eyes that don't come from the beating he got.

The girls come back with some more eats, all wrapped up, and some nice clean rags and a bottle of liniment. The oldest one, who's been doing all the talking says we'll be sore and stiff in the morning, and the liniment stuff will come in handy, and it sure does.

We starts to leave, and Tommy makes a little speech. "I ain't much on talking to ladies like you," he says, but I've got it to say that we're sure grateful. I had it all fixed up to make a bonfire of this burg tonight," he says, "but it won't be done. There won't be no medals hung on you for what you did for a bunch of bums," he says, "but every one of us will remember it to the last day, and be all the better for it. We'd like it a whole lot if you'd shake hands with us, and wish us luck like we wishes it to you."

They does that little thing; shakes hands all around and wishes us well, and we beats it out, feeling more like men again. The last we sees of them is the little girl waving her hand at us as we drills down the road.

We makes a camp out in the sticks a few miles from the burg, and sure puts in a fierce time for a few days, getting the kinks out of our systems. We was as sore as if we'd rolled down every step of the Washington monument, but all of us comes out pretty good except Hooch. He gets well and strong, but he don't seem just right; there's something on his mind. None of us asks him anything about the picture, for it's none of our funeral, and I guess every man has something hid away in his kick as a soovenir of other days.

Finally we gets started again, but the

pep is kind of knocked out of us for a while and we takes it easy, hitting it out for Denver and stopping over in Cheyenne where we cleans up pretty good at faro and roulette and craps by not doing any playing ourselves but by sticking up the joint. There's more chance of doing good for yourself that way; the bones and the little ball have an uncertain way of rolling, but a couple of gats will usually bring home the bacon.

Denver's lights burned pretty bright for us for several weeks, and for a wonder, I does good at poker, so good we thinks we'll organize to sell a gold mine. All that it takes is a sucker-list and a nice bunch of green-and-gold shares of stock. Nobody ever bothers about having a mine, and besides, if you did have a mine, you wouldn't be foolish enough to sell it. I guess all that keeps us from being financiers is Hooch getting sick and having to go to the hospital.

You remember I tell you about him getting the dome looked over in K C? Well, he lives pretty high in Denver; booze and general rough-stuff, and one day he goes down-and-out. None of us is with him at the time, but some jobbie sees him being took to the city hospital, and tells Tommy about it.

As I says, we're all well fixed, so we takes him out of the city dump and puts him where he'll have more attention, and one of us is on the job as often as they'll let us, and as he always seemed to take to me, I hangs round pretty much of the time.

He was pretty bad for a while; unconscious most of the time, but as soon as he gets back to his senses, he recognizes me, and tells me to bring his clothes so he can get the girl's picture. His duds had been taken care of all right, so I finds the photo in his pocket, and brings it to him. He looks at it a long time, and then he tells me about it.

It seems that he had lived in a town somewheres near Chicago, and was a regular fellow. He had done a stretch in a law school and they turned him out all fixed up as a mouth-piece, with pretty red ribbons and a gold seal on the documents. He lived with an aunt, his folks being dead a

long time, but they'd fixed him up to come into a bunch of kale when he got to be about thirty, said frog-skins to be his if he'd made something of himself by that time.

But he had a taste for booze. It ran in the family like a wooden leg, and he thought that was why his folks had put the age limit on his collecting the pile, thinking if he kept away from the demon rum till he was that old he'd never have no great yin for it later on. And he kept away pretty good; in fact, he said he'd never really been lit up until just a short time before he joins on with us.

He had a girl, and the wedding bells was to tear loose at an early date. The girl was the one in the picture, and her first name was "Hope." He was practicing law, all right; coming along pretty fair for a beginner, with his friends handing him a job whenever they could. Then he gets a streak of bad luck; losing one case after another till he gets afraid to do anything, for it seems everything he tackles gets the skids slipped to it and goes on the tobogan.

Now, when things is coming soft for a guy, and all of a sudden they turns the other way, it brings out what's in him, and in Hooch there was a desire to mop up all the booze there was in the neighborhood. He proceeds to do this to a fare-you-well, going down, down, down till he gets hanging round the barrel houses and his friends pass him up. Then one night a guy hands him some rough talk, and he beans the mutt with a beer bottle and beats it out of the dump.

Just as he gets out of the joint, staggering along, a glare of light from an auto catches him fair and square, and as he blinks at the light, the car stops and his girl opens the door and comes toward him. Then he hears the girl give a scream and fall down, and her driver jumps out and runs to pick her up, and Hooch runs, too, but just as he starts, something hits him over the head and he goes down and out.

He don't know nothing until next morning, when he wakes up in a box-car, and finds all his own clothes gone, and a bunch of somebody's duds alongside him. The train is rattling along so he can't get off, and he goes to sleep again, and when he

does finally hit the grit he finds himself in the East St. Louis yards.

He finds a couple of dollars in the clothes, and he also finds he's got a nasty cut on his head. He picks out a cheap flop, washes up, gets his scoffings and goes over to St. Louis and gets a home-town paper. It cheers him up a lot to read that he's set down as dead; cut all to pieces by a freight train in the yards of his home town. He dopes it out that the guy who rolled him for his clothes took all the other things and then got run over and was identified as him by their finding the papers and junk on the body. And he also reads that his aunt, who was in bad health at the time, is dead from the shock, and that his girl was all broken up.

All around, the poor lob is in pretty bad, but he says he felt that it didn't make no difference—felt kind of nutty someway or other, and he goes out and gets soused, then gets vagged, does a stretch in the Works, and when he gets out he hits the road, and soon he meets up with us.

It's sure enough some yarn, though I don't get it all at once on account of the nurse not letting him talk very much. But I gets it all in a few days, and wants him to wise me up some more so I can wire his friends. But there's nothing stirring, not one little thing, and he won't tell me what his town is, or nothing about his friends, and when I tells him what he ought to do, he gets sore and the nurse ties a can on my coming around for a week.

I gets Tommy to stick around, but I promised Hooch not to say anything, so I can't wise Tommy up to the plant. And all I've got to go on is the name of a photographer, which happens to be on the picture, but that's all—no name of a town or anything but the photographer's name and what the girl wrote on it herself. But I thinks I can make it at that.

Before I gets busy I has a talk with the head of the hospital, and he tells me Hooch had something pressing on his brain, a "blood clot," he calls it, and that they'd fixed it up so it wouldn't bother him no more. The doc asks me if I'd ever noticed anything out of the way with my friend, and I tells him about Hooch rubbing his

head like he was trying to think up something and couldn't get it across. In fairness to Hooch, I tells the doc that though the guy's traveling with a mob, I don't think he's no real yegg, though he *does* take to the rough-stuff pretty good. The doc says Hooch won't do no more rubbing of the head, and the chances are he won't take no more interest in yegging, for a part of the trouble the blood clot causes is a "suspension of moral faculties." That ain't my patter—I'm just a telling what he pulled on me, and it means, so the doc says, that Hooch didn't have no clear idea of right from wrong. I tells the doc I ain't got no blood clot, and I'm out for anything, and he says the trouble with me is that I'm a chump, and no operation will do my kind any good. I kind of think the guy's right at that.

As I said, all I've got to go on is the photographer's name, and which might be a favorite one for map-makers all over the country. If I was looking for a Boston store, or a New York store, I'd look for it in the middle west, but this picture proposition had me guessing right. But Hooch's home being near Chi, as he says, there ought to be a chance of locating the photographer near there.

The card the picture's mounted on has a funny kind of a border to it, so I goes to some of the studios in Denver and describes it, so they're able to tell me what dealer turns 'em out. The name on the card is "Carson" so I wires the card people, asking for the address of their customer of that name.

Pretty soon the wire comes back saying they have two customers named Carson; one in some town in North Carolina, and the other in Seattle. I takes a chance on the Seattle man and wires him, asking if he'd had a young lady customer with the first name of "Hope" in the past year, and says to telegraph the answer.

No answer for about a week, then I gets a letter saying he thinks he had a customer named Hope somebody, but he can't remember the last name, but she was from Milwaukee. He says he's had a fire lately, and all his records are gone, but he remembers the name, or a part of it, at least.

I guess this was bad, eh? Things was coming my way pretty good. But still I has to locate a girl named Hope in a burg like Milwaukee, which may not be no easy job after all. But I figures maybe Milwaukee's the place where Hooch comes from, and once there I can get all the dope, so I tells Tommy and Slim to watch out for our friend as I has to go east on a little deal, and I takes the next train out. I sure hates to pay out good money to a railroad company just for the privilege of riding, but sometimes it saves time, so I takes to the cushions for the first time in many years.

In Milwaukee I goes to the newspaper offices and gets into their files, and it ain't no time before I gets the whole story. Later I goes out to the cemetery and inspects the swell-looking stone they puts up "To the memory of William L. Winston," who "died on" such and such a date. And I also finds out who the Hope girl is, she being the daughter of a Dr. Seymour. He's out of town, as I finds out when I calls up the house, and I'm dead sure it was Miss Hope who answers the telephone. But of course, I don't say nothing to her about the case.

In the papers I finds out who it was who identified Hooch so thoroughly when they finds the body in the railroad yards. He's a banker, named Derner, and him and Hooch was great pals when everything was going good. It was in his bank that Hooch has all the money being kept until he gets to be thirty years old.

Now I likes, and dislikes, banks. I likes 'em because they gather up all the loose change in the neighborhood and make it easy for a guy to clean up right if he once gets to the box. But I dislikes 'em equally much, because they make it so darn hard for a guy to get to the bundles, and they raise such a fuss if you do happen to connect.

I ain't none too cheerful about going to the place. It's hard for a professional man to keep his mind off his graft, and the elbows round a bank can usually spot a guy who looks in a certain way at a bale of coin. I'd never been mugged in the burg, and I was kind of well-known pretty much all

over, and the dicks might have looked over my map in their gallery. You never can tell.

Anyway, I finds out that this banker guy always puts on the feed-bag at a certain table, at a certain restaurant, at a certain hour, every day. You know, one of those methodical ducks. So I slips a piece of change to the handsome waiter and he leads me up to the proper stall, just before Derner sits in.

This works out all right, and as I'm dolled up neat and plain, no one would have took me for anything but a retired plumber or some other man of means. The banker comes along in due time, and eases himself into the opposite chair, looks over the score board and orders his little row of eats. I makes some break about the weather, and the guy comes back with a little chatter and he talks a little of this and that. I says I've been away from the burg for about five months, but finds things going on just the same, and he says the place is one progressive little village.

"By the way," I says, "did they ever clear up the mystery about that Winston chap, the young lawyer who was supposed to be killed by the train?"

"No mystery about it at all," says Derner. "No mystery at all. I identified him myself; knew him for years. A customer of ours till he went wrong."

"You're in business here?" I says, pulling him along, and ordering a couple of the brew that put the town on the map. He slips me his card, showing him to be one of the higher-ups of the bank. I flashes my own pasteboard, which I got out when we was thinking of going into the mining game, and it sets me out as Mr. G. B. Wilson, Mining Engineer. We're glad to meet each other, and he comes back to Hooch, or Winston, making him out to be pretty much of a bum; not a kind word for the poor lob.

"Aha!" I says to myself, "our good neighbor must have come out pretty good on account of Hooch's kick-off; otherwise, why the unkind words?" Ain't it the truth that a good way to get a guy sore on you is to put something good his way? It ain't always the case, but often enough. But,

of course, I don't say nothing to the jobbie, and we changes the subject, and pretty soon Derner beats it out.

The hasher comes strolling over. Hashers is guys just like any one else; they has feelings but they don't always show 'em. This lob don't know me, but he's wise enough to know there's a plant on somewhere.

"I hears you say something about Billy Winston," he says, stacking up Derner's dishes and not looking at me at all.

"I might be around the Post Office about seven-thirty to-night," I says, reaching for my check and slipping a case note to the jobbie.

"I'm certain to be there," he says, and as it happens, he was.

Now, when a bunch of fellows eat regular at a joint, day after day, they talk among each other pretty free, and it happens that Hooch or Winston used to eat with Derner and a couple of other fellows all the time, and this hasher always has their table. And naturally, he can't but over-hear a lot of their chatter. He liked Winston, and he said Miss Seymour was one of the finest ladies in the town. Sometimes she'd come in with Winston for lunch and women always show whether they're good people or not in a public dining-room.

But he didn't like Derner; said he was crooked and had got into the money held in trust for Winston, claiming Billy had debts that had to be took care of. He says Winston was some bar-fly at the last, but he couldn't see where he'd run up any debts, for he'd always paid as he went along, and always had a bunch of cash on hand. He tells me of another friend of Hooch's a chap named Miller who ran a sporting-goods store and who was straight as a string. He says if I'm after any dope on Winston to see this Miller guy.

The hasher don't know that Winston ain't dead and I don't wise him up any. He'd have slipped the glad news to his skirt, and she'd have it spilled all over the burg before breakfast. Hashers is useful, and lots of them is all-right guys, but this was deep stuff. So I lets the jobbie think what he wants to, and slips him a five case-note so he'd forget knowing me.

It's too late to see this Miller fellow, but I got to him next morning. He was a swell guy, just as the hasher says, good and straight all the way through, and wise like a fish. So I don't do no stalling, but asks if I can get his ear in his private office for a minute.

"What's the big idea?" he says, giving me the up and down with a pair of clear, gray lamps.

"Billy Winston," I says.

Miller's face lights up and he whistles soft and lowlike. "Come along," he says, "and travel fast," giving me the east and west and leading me into a little cubby-hole he had screened off at the back of the store.

"What about Billy?" he says, pushing a box of ropes toward me as I sat down.

I tells him all I knows and he listens close, asking a question now and then. It don't seem to worry him none that I'm a yegg, and he gets enough out of the tale to make me all right. Anyway, he goes out of the room a couple of times to attend to something or other he can't stall off, leaving a roll of bills on his desk where they were laying when he came in. And they were all grands, too.

He calls up on the telephone after he gets all the story and gives a number. When he gets it he says: "Good morning, Hope!" looking over at me and smiling, and then he tells her to ask the doc to come to the phone.

When the doc answers, he tells him not to say anything before Hope, but he has news of Billy Winston, and for the doc to beat 'it down to the store.

I hears the doc yell "The hell you say!" happy as a kid, and slam up the receiver, and I'll bet it wasn't three minutes before he comes in the store, looking happy as a chicken with a new pair of silk stockings.

Miller introduces me, and I tells the story again, adding what Derner said about Winston. The two guys nod over this like they was wise, and then the doc asks for the name of the hospital in Denver, and puts in a long distance call for the dump. We sit around for a while, and the two guys asks questions about what we'd been doing, and I knows they're both right and tells them the truth. It don't seem to bother

them none, and they laughs hearty when I tell them how we has to educate Hooch to be a regular 'bo.

Pretty soon Denver comes on the wire, and Doc Seymour talks to the doc in the hospital, and it happens they know each other. Anyway, it seems that Hooch is coming along fine and dandy, and Seymour says to keep him a few days longer and he and Miller will come out after him.

Nothing will do but that I has to go to lunch with the two chaps, and we goes down to the restaurant where I saw the Derner guy. He's putting on the feed-bag as we come in, and nods to the doc, but has nothing for Miller, and when he sees me with the two jobbies I guess he gets a man's-sized hunch, for he loses his interest in the eats, and beats it out pretty sudden-like. I wises Miller to his play, and he and the doc has a good laugh, and even the hasher slips me a side-look that says he's on.

I'm fixed up for a theater party that night, with the two gents and Miss Hope is along. Doc wises me that I am to be her escort in the place of Hooch, and say! maybe I didn't have to do some running around. I asks the doc, as man to man, if I'm dolled up right for the doings, and as man to man, he tells me that my collar is too low, and my tie is too passionate to be good form, so I gets fixed up right. But never again with a manicure! Little Blondie at the barber shop tries to correct and make up for years of neglect, and my fingers are so sore that I can't hardly light a match, let alone pick up change. It's a great life if you don't weaken, but it's fierce getting started right.

It was some feed, believe me. There was things to eat and drink that I never heard of, and they were all good. When I thinks of the scoffings I has to put up with half the time, just because I'm a yegg and pretty much of a bum, and when I lamps around the dump and sees all the well-dressed men, and the dolled-up janes taking in the grub, and the music and the lights as a matter of course, it makes me think that the doc at the Denver hospital is right when he says I'm a chump and nothing will do me any good. All these happy hours is

mine, or anybody else's if they handles their affairs right.

Just at the time when I'm kind of kicking myself, the orchestra starts a piece of music I hears one night at the Star and Garter, the words going something like this:

"What's the use of dreaming, dreams of rosy hue;
What's the use of dreaming, dreams that never
could come true.

You are worth a million, there is not a doubt—
Then your pipe goes out."

Ain't it the truth? And yet—oh, hell! What's the use? I guess Doc Seymour and Miller, and all the other well-fixed guys I sees around me has as much worry and grief as I has, and maybe a darn sight more, in spite of their having it pretty soft in some ways. Things even up pretty much in this world, but it's pretty nice not to have to worry about the dicks being wise to your map.

Say, you reads in the magazines about some gink talking about his jane, and he says she's "wonderful." That always gives me a pain, that "wonderful" stuff, but after I meets Miss Hope I sees that maybe the guy who's pulling the stuff has met some girl like her. Take a woman who has no sense and she might be a bear for looks, but that's all. But when you sees a woman who's been educated, who's traveled, who's wise to everything that's fit to know, and then hand her a bunch of good looks—say, man, then you have something worth while. And that was Miss Hope.

I don't know how I gets through with the supper, and the theater party. I says "yes'm" and "no'm" when I thinks it's right, and does my darndest with all the forks and spoons they piles up around my plate, and nobody gives me the laugh, so I guess I gets away with it all right.

We goes to the theater in a gasoline bus, but all the actors is wops, and while they does a lot of singing that's pretty good, I don't think anybody's wise to what they're singing about, but everybody is good-natured and don't make a roar. We has a box, and between the singing, Miss Hope pumps me all about Hooch, and what he's been doing, and I eases it down a bit for

her, and don't get into the rough stuff like I hands it to Miller and the doc. I figures Miss Hope is going to marry Hooch sometime, and what's the use of her having a lot of stuff on him that she can hang over his head? And at that, Hooch ain't been responsible; us jobbies gets him into all the deals.

But I tells her about the deal in Kansas, when we gets the run and she cries about it. She's a heap interested in how Hooch gets the picture, and says she went out to Seattle to try and calm herself after they all thinks Hooch has been croaked, and had her picture took, and she's always been hopeful that Hooch wasn't dead, and her name being Hope, too, she writes that "Picture of Hope" across the map on one she sends to an aunt in Kansas City, and the aunt never gets it, and it's very likely the one the little missies find on the railroad track. She says it was the work of Providence, and wants to know the name of the town so she can write to the little girls, but I don't remember the place, or where it was.

We all starts for Denver the next morning, and it's only a day or two before everything is fixed up. Hooch is up and around the dump when we get there, and he almost keels over when Miss Hope comes in first and rushes up to him. Slim and Tommy is there with me and Miller and the doc, and we all looks out the windows while the two hands each other a little loving talk, and hugs each other a bit. I've seen some lucky guys in my time; I've seen jobbies break a faro bank, or clean out the house at roulette, or make a clean get-away with a roll that would choke the fire-box of a locomotive, but take it from me, 'bo, the man who has all the love of a good woman is the luckiest guy who ever lives. It's handy to have a bunch of frog-skins, I'll tell the world it is, but the guy who has a woman loving him, and thinking of him, and doing for him—everything will come out right for that guy if he does what's right. Live and learn as the fellow says, and I sure wises up on a whole lot in the plant I'm just telling you about.

And now there ain't no more to tell; not a hell of a lot, anyway. Hooch and

Miss Hope gets married that same day. Miller gets a wire from a friend of his in Milwaukee that Derner is claiming to have found a block of stock put away in Hooch's name and which the bank didn't know it had. I guess he saw a flock of lights somewhere.

Us jobbies fall for something kind of nifty in the way of a silver set for the bride and groom. We lifted a set like it in Toledo one time, and some way or other we always fancied the design. The three of us has a date with Doc Seymour and

Miller for the next morning after Hooch and his wife beats it out for the Coast. The doc tells me that Hooch wants to express his appreciation of how we took care of him, but he'd done that already by being so happy.

We knew it was us who got him back to Miss Hope and his friends, and he knew it was us, and that was enough. We were satisfied, there wasn't anything more he could do.

So the date with doc and Miller was never kept.



THE QUEST OF THE HOLY GRAIL

BY KENNETH BRUCE

ANGRY and wild was the fearful night,
Pierced by the zigzag forks of light,
As pole struck pole with rumbling might
Like hammer against mail;
And many a brave soul quaked with fright
As we sought the Holy Grail.

Valiant and tried was our little band—
Victors of many a well-fought strand,
Pilgrims o'er sea and distant land,
On mountaintop, in dale;
O'er meadow green and burning sand
We marched for the Holy Grail.

Some of the faces were bright and fair,
Others were seamed with deep despair;
But each in the lightning's lurid glare,
Burning with hope and zeal,
Like meteor in the blackened air,
Gleamed from its casque of steel.

Then a wail arose from the thousand brave:
"Suffer, O Lord, the stream to lave
Our burning feet! Thy pilgrims save
From death! We thirst, we thirst!
We fear not pain or the silent grave,
But grant us the conquest first!"

My heart was smitten that fearful night:
"O Lord, wilt Thou pity Thy servants' plight,
And show them the way with Thy wondrous light
Ere they dash on a hidden stone?"
When morning broke with radiance bright
I had won the Grail—alone!

How Many Cards?

by Isabel Ostrander

Author of "Ashes to Ashes," "Twenty-Six Clues," "Suspense," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

EX-ROUNDSMAN TIMOTHY McCARTY followed a suspicious-looking figure along the avenue. When the man entered the Creveling house, McCarty hid in the araway. A moment later the second-story man leaped from a window and the ex-officer collared him. Clancy, the officer on the beat, answered his call for assistance, but the young burglar insisted he was not responsible for what they would find inside.

On the library floor they found a gentleman in evening clothes shot through the heart. An army .44 lay close to his hand. Off the library was a breakfast-room with the remains of a late supper. From the rug McCarty picked up a bit of broken amber, part of a cigarette-holder. Clancy notified borough headquarters, and McCarty sent for his friend, Inspector Druet.

The house was empty of servants, but on the third floor two of the servants' rooms were littered with clothes. While the ex-roundsman and the inspector were looking over this floor of the house, McCarty thought he first heard, then saw a fleeting form as he looked over the stairs to the floor below.

Then the bell rang and McCarty admitted a dapper gentleman, who explained he had arrived in answer to an urgent telephone message, which insisted that he come at once. He stated he was George Alexander, Mrs. Creveling's uncle, and her husband's business partner. The inspector's examination of Alexander failed to reveal any leads. The dead man's partner was as guarded in his answers as Frank Hill, Creveling's valet, who next arrived on the scene. The valet testified he had taken a bag of clean linen to his master at the club on the previous night at eleven o'clock, after arranging for the supper at the house. Rollins, the butler, and his wife, the cook, had been given a holiday, and the other servants had been dismissed when Mrs. Creveling set out on her round of visits.

McCarty in the meantime unearthed another lead; under the table-cover in the library he found a playing card, the nine of diamonds, blood-stained and torn.

The ex-roundsman was pressing the valet to explain his whereabouts from eleven o'clock of the night before until his arrival on the scene, when Mrs. Creveling arrived and demanded: "What has happened to my husband?"

No sooner was Mrs. Creveling informed of the death of her husband than she exclaimed "who killed him?" The inspector found she had been summoned home by a telephone call which she supposed came from her cook. The call had come before five o'clock, a full three-quarters of an hour earlier than the wire sent by the police.

Meanwhile, McCarty, whose eyes never left Hill, saw a furtive glance pass between him and Alexander. McCarty followed Hill from the room and they bumped into the arriving butler and his wife. He was convinced there was also an understanding between Hill and Rollins, the butler. From the latter he learned Creveling and Waverly had had words about a fortnight ago and Mrs. Creveling had stated Mr. Waverly was not at Broadmead the night of the murder.

Then Wade Terhune, the noted criminologist whom Mrs. Creveling insisted on calling, arrived. McCarty greeted him and then went out to keep an appointment with Waverly, who had phoned to the Creveling house to offer his assistance after hearing of the accident, from his wife. McCarty forced Waverly to admit he had frequently quarreled with Creveling because of the latter's wild ways. However, he established an alibi for himself which Sam Venner, a shady character confirmed.

McCarty was anxious to make his report to his chief and disclose the evidence of some one having opened the desk with the spring lock, between the time he had first examined the desk with his chief and the time he returned shortly after, for a second and more private inspection. Gloves had been used and the lock oiled.

But as he was about to enter his apartment he encountered his young reporter friend, Jimmie

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Ballard, who asked for McCarty's version of the case. In return he gave Mac some valuable information as to the Creveling set and explained the leader of the set was Nicholas Cutter.

Then McCarty went on to view Miss Frost at her hotel and learned of the strange night visits of Mrs. Kip and her disheveled condition and her wounded arm on her return home early in the morning of the night of the murder. He was in the midst of an interview with Mrs. Lonsdale Ford when the latter left him to greet her husband in the hall. "We're done for, girl," he heard Ford say to his wife. The man admitted to McCarty he had some dealings with Waverly and had seen him the day of the crime before he bundled the ex-roundsman out of the house.

Finally, McCarty returned to the Creveling house and learned from Mrs. Creveling that some months ago she had had a valuable necklace stolen. A servant, Ilsa Helwig had been arrested and released on bail, furnished in cash by a mysterious stranger. Then the girl disappeared. When he left Mrs. Creveling's bedside, the ex-roundsman was convinced the face of the maid who showed him to the door was familiar. Was it the mysterious face that had so suddenly appeared at one of the windows on the morning following the murder, when McCarty had looked out of the cab on his way to keep the appointment with Waverly?

If McCarty was unimpressed with the quiet elegance of the house, he was properly impressed with Nicholas Cutter. Cutter intimidated Creveling was given to brain-storms in the past year. McCarty was struck with the unanimity of effort on the part of the Creveling set to keep something dark. He instructed Druet to set the valet free at eight o'clock that evening.

When Hill left the station he proceeded at once to the Creveling house. McCarty and Riordan trailed him. On the ledge of a third-story window, the fireman covered the rear premises of the Creveling mansion. Their man finally appeared and the two watchers followed him to a drug-store in the early Thirties, near Third Avenue. From the clerk they learned where "Hildreth and his wife" lived, just around the corner. When Ilsa Helwig opened the door, McCarty told her she was wanted. Quicker than thought she had slammed and bolted the door. Riordan and McCarty entered the apartment to find their quarry had fled by the fire-escape. In reporting to the inspector McCarty took the full blame for this untoward accident.

The ex-roundsman was dead set against the inspector's conviction of the guilt of the valet Hill; he was equally inimical to Terhune's arrogant assumption of the guilt of George Alexander, though he was curious to hear the man's confession which Terhune promised. He was tremendously impressed, however, by Terhune's exposition of the historical symbolism of the nine of diamonds. "No quarter," he repeated to Riordan. "You got that, Denny? 'Twas a notice to Creveling that his time had come!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LURE OF CHANCE.

ON their way to breakfast the next morning McCarty bought a sheaf of newspapers and when the modest little restaurant was reached he handed all but one of them to his companion.

"Here, Denny. Have a look at what the boys say about the release of Hill. I'll bet they've put up a howl you could hear in the next world if so be you were there."

"Which I'm not yet, but there's no telling after to-night," Dennis said darkly. "You'd no call to be letting me in for another dose of the black art of that Terhune! Have you no interest yourself in the news of the day?"

"I'm looking for a certain ad," McCarty replied. "Here it is:

"LOST—On Thursday night, black Russian sable scarf, five skins, private seal engraved on small gold clasp; liberal reward. Address X, Daily Bulletin."

"Whatever—" Dennis gave a little start. "Oh, I remember! And is 'X' Mrs. Kip?"

"No. 'Tis me," said McCarty modestly. "After I phoned you last night to meet me for dinner I stopped at the *Bulletin* office and put that in; I'd like to see Mrs. Kip's face if she reads it! But what's the matter with your own? You look as if something had bit you!"

"Mac!" The newspaper shook in Dennis's excited hand. "What was it that you heard Ford say to his wife in the hall yesterday? That he was 'done for,' wasn't it?"

"Yes. What—"

"Well, I guess he was, all right! Give a look at that!"

Dennis passed over the paper and McCarty read in flaring headlines:

FAILURE ON STOCK EXCHANGE

Lonsdale Ford & Company Go To Wall

Many Small Investors and Speculators Hard Hit in Crash

Below, in smaller type, appeared the story in detail, but McCarty merely glanced through it. He was working against time now; against the time when the inspector's

dragnet might bring in the girl, Ilsa, or he might tire of waiting and arraign Hill formally before a magistrate on a murder charge. A sudden inspiration had come to the ex-roundsman and characteristically he determined to put it at once to the test.

"So that was what Ford meant?" McCarty commented. "Come on, let's order; I'll go over and have a little interview with him before he leaves the house. I'm thinking he'll be more ready to talk, now that it's all come out, than he was yesterday."

They ate a quick breakfast and McCarty left Dennis to proceed to the firehouse with the understanding that the latter was to call for him at his rooms at eight that night. In the cross-town car he studied the *Bulletin* once more, but not for the satisfaction of rereading his advertisement; the reproduction of a photograph on the second page had caught his eye and he recognized it at once.

It was that of a broad-shouldered man of about forty, undeniably handsome at a casual glance, although closer inspection revealed a slight but telltale fulness of the lips and heaviness of jowl, and the eyes with their almost feminine sweep of lashes did not seem to meet the gaze quite squarely. There were incipient pouches beneath them, too, and the smile which was intended to be dashing held the suggestion of a leer. Under the picture was the name "Eugene Christopher Creveling."

Where had he seen that living face before? He had known it on sight for that of the man stretched upon the floor of the study two nights ago, and yet McCarty felt a peculiar, haunting sense of familiarity as of a living presence. Creveling's picture had appeared in the newspapers frequently enough in connection with various escapades in the old days, but it was not that. He could associate no sound of a voice in connection with the face in his memory, recall no details, but he knew that somewhere quite lately he had seen that man alive.

He was still pondering over it when he reached the St. Maur Apartments.

"Mr. and Mrs. Ford ain't here, suh. They done gone away; went last night," the saddle-colored switchboard-operator told him.

McCarty smiled.

"No, they didn't," he said with easy assurance. "I know all about Mr. Ford's trouble and I'm not here to bother him, He'll see me, all right. Just say Mr. McCarty wants a word with him."

The boy hesitated, but the note of authority as well as confidence which rang in the ex-roundsman's tones impressed him and reluctantly he obeyed. There was a moment of evident indecision at the other end of the wire and then he turned a relieved face to the visitor.

"You can go right up, suh. I don't know—I had orders not to announce *nobody*, and Mr. Ford is a mighty positive gentleman!"

"I know him!" McCarty grinned as he thought of his reception on the previous day. "He's out of luck just now and his bark is worse than his bite."

The same servant admitted him as on the day before, but the smile was gone from his Asiatic countenance, and although the drawing-room presented as bravely luxurious an air there was an atmosphere of forlorn bravado about it which permeated even McCarty's matter-of-fact sensibilities.

"Well, what can I do for you now?" A toneless, indescribably weary voice spoke just behind him and McCarty wheeled, an uncontrollable gasp escaping him as his eyes met those of Lonsdale Ford. Could this broken creature with his twisted, bitter, tragic smile be the same man who had so coolly and arrogantly ordered him from his presence on the previous day?

"Mr. Ford! I—I hope you'll not think I'd have intruded on you now if I could have helped it, sir, but we're still working on the Creveling matter and I've got to obey orders."

"Oh, that's all right, my man. One thing more or less doesn't make any difference now." Ford motioned toward a chair and then sank into another opposite, as though his legs would no longer support him, yet he added with a touch of the old savageness in his tone: "I didn't shoot Creveling, if it will do you any good to know it, but I wish I had, and then put a bullet through my own brain! He's dead, but he was a damned cur! The papers

are saying a lot of rotten things about me this morning; that I played my customers for suckers and God knows what else, but if I was as white-livered as he I'd go and jump off the nearest dock!"

"I've heard that intimated by more than you, Mr. Ford. We never had the least thought of you being guilty, but we think there's some information it's in your power to give us that 'll maybe help a lot." McCarty paused. "Of course, if you don't care to give it we can't compel you now—"

"Oh, I'll give it, fast enough!" Ford's harsh, dry laughter rang out and then was as quickly suppressed. "I don't know whether it will help you or not, for I haven't the slightest idea who killed Creveling, but I'll give you all the information you want about the whole rotten bunch of them! I kept my mouth shut yesterday because I had a sort of forlorn hope that they'd be white enough to tide me over even after Creveling himself had welched, but when Cutter threw me down cold I made up my mind that I'd show them all up and I will! They got the money—my own, not my customers', but if I'd had it, I could have weathered the storm. I wouldn't kick if the game had been straight; I'm not a poor loser, but I'm convinced it was crooked and I've been made the sucker. God! Even a tin-horn card-sharp will stake you to cigarette money after he's stripped you of your roll!"

"Game?" McCarty repeated, a light beginning to glimmer through his consciousness.

"Of course. I was on my way to being a rich man even in these skyrocketing days, but it's all gone over that green table of Cutter's, damn him!" Ford stopped abruptly and the rage in his face gave way to a look of sly derision. "You fellows at headquarters are mighty smart, but you didn't know that the biggest games in the city are pulled off and have been for years in that respectable-looking house of his down on the avenue! He is nothing more nor less than a professional gambler, only he does things on a scale that's never been known before even in the big town."

A gambler! The connecting link at last! It was the gambling fever, the lure of

chance which held this strangely assorted group of people together. More potent than drink or drugs, it had bound them in an association of silence for mutual protection, and drawn gentleman and cad, aristocrat and upstart into a degenerating democracy! But why hadn't he guessed?

Then the memory of a chance remark of Dennis's on the previous evening returned to make his chagrin complete. When he told his friend what he had learned from Miss Frost about the Kip woman and how she had been broke one day and flush the next Dennis remarked: "Like a gambler!" Even then he had not tumbled to the truth!

It all seemed so obvious now in the light of this revelation! Those two dissipated rounders, Waverley and Creveling, seeking to stimulate their jaded senses with the excitement of the game; this money-mad Ford, to whom all of life had been a gamble; John Cavanaugh O'Rourke, with the hot, reckless, sport-loving blood of his forebears in his veins, and Cutter sitting cold and inscrutable in the midst of them! But what of the women? Where did they figure in this scheme of things?

"I'm not yellow!" Ford went on. "I wouldn't cry 'crooked!' just because I'd been stung, but looking back now I can see how I was played, like a trout in a stream, and they're doing the same thing to O'Rourke. They'll clean him and his wife, too, before they're through—Cutter and Waverley and Creveling was helping it along when he got his! He stood in, and I was just beginning to see it; that's why I went to him first when I saw what was coming. I wasn't a beggar, I only wanted a loan of some of my own back and Creveling had got most of it. He understood, he knew I was on to the game and he told me he'd see me through; made an appointment with me for Thursday and then at the last minute took back his word, welched! He thought he could bluff me, but I'd have gone back yesterday and got it from him anyhow but for his being shot!"

McCarty was scarcely listening. "They'll clean him and his wife, too!" were the last words which had pounded themselves into his brain.

"Do you mean that Lady Mar—that Mrs. O'Rourke plays, too? That Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Creveling and Mrs. Waverley have been going up against a game like that?"

Ford laughed again, mirthlessly.

"They're worse than we are! Not that my wife is an inveterate gambler; as a matter of fact, the poor kid hasn't any card sense at all and doesn't even care for it. She only piked along because I—I compelled her to."

"You?"

Ford nodded.

"Oh, I admit I've been a fool in more ways than one, but I'm coming clean to you now, for I want you to understand the situation and fix Cutter and his outfit!" he declared frankly. "I was making money and we were happy enough a few years ago with our own jolly little crowd, but when I bought my seat on the Exchange Mrs. Ford got ambitious socially. She met Mrs. Creveling at some charity affair and got in with her, and Creveling introduced me to Cutter. That was the beginning of it, and I don't mind telling you that I encouraged Mrs. Ford to travel with that bunch; I thought I'd get in myself through them with big-moneyed interests and I didn't realize I was practically using my own wife as a capper, the way Cutter is using Mrs. Baillie Kip. She's just a kind of a grown-up little girl, my wife is; she loves to spend money and be taken up by the swell people, and she never can realize that there might be another motive behind the flattery of other men, rotters like Cutter. He made a sort of play for her a year or so ago and she came to me like a big kid and told me; I let him know where he got off and after that she wasn't bothered, but they had it in for me. You see the game now, don't you, McCarty?"

McCarty nodded slowly in his turn and his expression was very grim, but he waited without speaking.

"Mrs. Creveling and Mrs. Waverley are different; they belong by right of birth and their old, withered family-trees. They don't have to struggle to get anywhere, and in another way they are just as jaded as their husbands. They've exhausted every

allowable means of amusing themselves and they turned to the game for what excitement they could get out of it, and it got them—the fascination, I mean. You've seen them, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"They're both beauties; Mrs. Creveling in a cold, aloof sort of way and Mrs. Waverley is a devilish, snaky vamp. Both mighty attractive and each a different type; get me?"

"You mean that Cutter is using them both as steerers, too?" McCarty's honest tones were filled with shocked amazement. "Ladies like them, with positions in the highest society and more money than they can spend!"

"Oh, without their knowledge, of course, but their husbands stood in with Cutter. I know, because they were constantly at his house, at the so-called little intimate dinners and afternoon musicales he was supposed to give, but which really masked the games which went on day and night. The rest of us were rank outsiders asked only on certain specified nights; only the Crevelings and the Waverleys met all the different exclusive little groups that gathered there. That is the secret of Cutter's success and his immunity. You don't think he made his millions out of just our set, do you? He kept his crowds separate, with those exceptions, and only catered to people who could no more afford the scandal and notoriety of a raid than he could.

"More than one poor devil has lost his last dollar and shot himself in that room that looks like a conservatory at the back of Cutter's house, and I'll wager that more money has changed hands there in any given length of time than at Monte Carlo for the same period!

"But no scandal has ever attached to Cutter, his system was too perfect for that; the poor devils who did themselves in were spirited home, and the papers made a big fuss later over their deaths from accident or appendicitis operations, or some such lie. Of course, their families were as eager to conceal the truth as Cutter; that's where he played safe. The worst part of it is that he is a real aristocrat, if there is such a thing in this country; his family is one

of the oldest, and he has always kept his social position impregnable, though I understand he inherited nothing but the house and some rotten ancestor's gambling instinct! People don't dare squeal on him, for he has clients and victims among the connections of every prominent family in the country. He thought I wouldn't dare, either, but I've got nothing to lose now."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIRST BIG GUN.

"I WONDER he didn't take that into consideration," McCarty remarked. "You say he refused to let you have a loan to tide you over when he knew it meant ruin to you?"

Ford colored painfully.

"There was a personal matter involved and it warped his judgment, I guess," he mumbled. "My wife, you know."

"I see." McCarty strove to make his voice sympathetic, but he was filled with loathing for the unprincipled weakling before him. He'd borrow money, if he could, from a man who had insulted his wife, and if he couldn't, sell him out! The ex-roundsman's foot tingled to administer a kick to the cowardly sneak, but he must learn more. "If Mrs. Waverley and Mrs. Creveling played just because they were bored and Mrs. Ford because you wanted her to, why did Mrs. Kip and—and Mrs. O'Rourke sit in the game?"

"Oh, Connie Kip is a born adventuress; a professional gambler in a way, like Cutter," replied Ford carelessly. "She's too shrewd to jeopardize the social position she has wormed herself into by any indiscreet flirtation, but the cards are her means of a livelihood and I could swear I've caught her cheating more than once, though if Cutter knows it he doesn't mind her counting herself in on his graft, for she's popular and useful to him as a steerer. It is through her that he gets his clutches on the young asses in society with more money than brains."

"Was she at Cutter's on Thursday evening?" asked McCarty suddenly.

"No, only the O'Rourkes. We expected

Creveling, but he phoned that he couldn't make it, so we had a five-handed game; tame enough, too, with neither Creveling nor Waverley there. They were the plungers, and helping along Cutter's fleecing of O'Rourke, I suspect. I might have warned him, I suppose, but I had my own fish to fry in trying to win my money back from them or get a loan, and then misery loves company, you know!"

"But Mrs. O'Rourke?" persisted McCarty. "What possessed her to play?"

"For the same reason that her husband did; a sheer love of the game," responded Ford with an odd note of respectful admiration in his tone. "She's a thorough-going sportswoman, and I hear she came from a long line of hard-riding, heavy-drinking, devil-may-care Irish nobility who would have staked all they had any day on the turn of a card. For all she's so utterly feminine, she's the gamest loser I ever saw for a woman, or man, either, and there isn't another in the crowd who can touch her for looks and brains and charm, but she's such a clean sport herself that I don't suppose she has an inkling there is anything crooked about the whole outfit."

McCarty rose. He felt suddenly stifled, as though his breakfast had not agreed with him. This cheap renegade might be useful to him in the future and his native caution warned him to go before he expressed himself openly. Not for the life of him could he listen to another word concerning the Lady Peggy, even in praise, from such lips.

"Thank you, sir. I guess you've told me all I need to know to work on now and I won't pester you any longer. I won't give you away, but there'll be no more fleecing of Mr. O'Rourke nor any one else, I can promise you that."

"I don't give a damn about that, I'm done!" Ford followed him to the door. "Creveling got his, although I don't know from what particular motive, of many possible ones that his murderer might have had. Waverley won't last long at the pace he is traveling, but Cutter is the man I want to see shown up; he'd rather be shot, any day, than have that happen, for he's got a certain pride of a sort. I'm dead

sorry that you can't hang the murder on him, for thieves fall out, you know, but we'd have to help prove his alibi unless we perjured ourselves and there were the O'Rourkes, anyway. Nail him for running a crooked game and I'll be your star witness!"

McCarty breathed deeply when he reached the street once more, as though to clear his lungs from a fetid atmosphere, but he felt that he had accomplished more in the past hour than at any time since he had undertaken the case. He was on the inside now, looking out, and although he had learned nothing which pointed to the actual solution of the crime there was a chance, that the right thread was in his hands at last.

During his interview with the bankrupt broker an idea had come to him which completely revolutionized his earlier plan of procedure and he lost no time in finding a telephone-booth and calling up headquarters. His later decision had not been brought about by anything he had learned from Ford, nor was it connected with Nicholas Cutter and his *sub rosa* profession; it was the alternate thread in the tangle which might lead to the truth.

Inspector Druet was already at his desk and informed him that Yost reported no trace of the missing Hildreth woman, and Martin, when he was relieved at the Creveling house, said that Hill had betrayed neither protest nor surprise at finding himself under guard, nor had he made the least move to escape espionage. The report of the chief medical examiner on the autopsy had come in also, and he had reversed the opinion of his assistant; Creveling could not have killed himself. It had been murder.

"Perhaps it's just as well, sir," McCarty's tone was humble. "I've changed my mind, thinking over the dope you've got against Hill, and, moreover, I've dug up a few things this morning that look like they might make the case complete."

"I thought so!" the inspector laughed jubilantly. "Good old Mac! You're not afraid to admit you've made a mistake, are you?"

"No, sir," McCarty responded slyly. "Not being regularly connected with the

force any longer, promotion don't bother me and when I'm in the wrong there's nothing to hold me back from saying so, and starting over. I've been thinking that as long as you've got the dragnet out after that Hildreth woman and the stations and ferries and roads watched so that she can't make her getaway from the city, we're bound to land her in time and there's no use in waiting for her to try to get in touch with Hill before we run him in again. I think I've got a way to make him talk after a day or two in the Tombs, but I'd like to make the arrest myself."

"Go to it!" the inspector said heartily. "Your mind was so set on it that he wasn't guilty, I thought I'd give you a few days to find out that you were barking up the wrong tree, but the Hildreth woman is too clever by half to give herself away by trying to communicate with him. Come down here and I'll have a warrant ready for you to take with you."

"Couldn't you send it up to me at the Creveling house?" McCarty asked. "I'm on my way there now, sir, and I don't want to lose any time."

"All right. I'll have it there in half an hour." Inspector Druet added: "Have you seen anything of Terhune?"

"Yes, sir. He broke into my rooms last night and Denny and me found him sitting there as calm as you pleased when we came up from headquarters!" McCarty almost choked over the recollection. "He's invited us both to one of his seances tonight."

"I'll see you there, then." The inspector laughed once more. "He has the case all doped out to suit himself, I suppose, but he wouldn't condescend to take me into his confidence. It won't matter to us, Mac, for if he's hit on the truth we'll have the bird safely caged beforehand. Do you want us to keep the news of Hill's rearrest out of the papers?"

"No, but leave that to me, sir. I want to give a young friend of mine, Jimmie Ballard, of the *Bulletin*, a beat for the first evening edition; after that they can all go to it, and welcome, the more publicity the better. It's only that Jimmie's done me a good turn in the shape of information

now and again and I'd like to put something his way."

"It's all in your hands, Mac, so long as there isn't any slip in getting Hill under lock and key. One of the boys will be at the house with the warrant almost as soon as you are."

But McCarty did not at first turn his steps in the direction of the Creveling house. Instead he took a down-town Third Avenue car and alighted at the scene of the Hildreth woman's escape on the previous night. The stout young operative from the detective bureau who had relieved Yost was seated in the kitchen, where the broken door and smashed flower-pots still bore mute evidence of siege and flight. It was evident, too, from a hasty glance around the few barely furnished rooms of the little flat that Yost and the policeman on the beat had made an even more thorough search of the premises for possible clues than McCarty and Dennis had done.

Every drawer and box and receptacle of any sort had been thrown open and its contents scattered far and wide; even the bed had been ripped apart and the cheap upholstery of the parlor suite was cut and slashed to ribbons, undoubtedly in a search for the stolen emeralds. McCarty looked everywhere, but that which he himself conscientiously sought was not forthcoming—a gilt-edged pack of playing-cards with their backs printed in rich colors and gold.

Half an hour later, accompanied with obvious reluctance by another man, he presented himself at the Creveling house and was admitted by Rollins, who eyed his companion somewhat uneasily before addressing his visitors.

"Good morning, sir. There's a—a person waiting 'ere for you. 'E said as 'ow you'd be along presently."

"That's all right; I'll see him in a minute. How is Mrs. Creveling?"

"Better, sir, the doctor says, but resting. Mrs. Waverley and Mr. Alexander are up-stairs with 'er."

"I don't want to bother any of them," McCarty said hastily. "My business is with the valet, Frank Hill. Will you ask him to come here?"

"Very good, sir."

When the butler had departed upon his errand McCarty turned to his companion.

"Go into the breakfast-room, there, but leave the door ajar. Listen to everything that is said and when I call you, come out. Understand?"

"Yes." The man moved over to the door indicated, shaking his head disapprovingly as he went. "I don't like this business! It don't seem fair to me, even if this fellow has done what you say he has. It's a dirty trick!"

As he disappeared a fourth man slid around from an angle of the stairs where he had evidently been waiting.

"Here, Mac. Here's the warrant the old man sent up; want me to stay and serve it for you?"

"No. Give it to me, Hecker, but you'd better wait with Yost. Go up-stairs and bring him down to the back hall as soon as I get into talk with Hill, and when I serve him you can do the rest."

The man withdrew and McCarty pocketed the warrant as Hill, pale and worn, but quite composed, appeared on the stairs.

"Good morning, sir. You wanted to speak to me?"

"Yes. Hill, what did you do when you were released from the station-house last night?"

"I came straight back here, sir. I—I hadn't been given any notice and I am still in service, for Mrs. Creveling is keeping me on, at least till things are straightened out, sir." His tone was respectful, but indifferent, as though the reply were a superfluous one.

"You've been here ever since; in the house, I mean?"

"Of course, sir." This time he spoke with mild surprise.

"Where do you stay on your time off, Hill?"

"I sleep here, sir; I haven't any place of my own. I've been right with Mr. Creveling all these years."

"Do you ever travel under any other name than the one you're known by here?"

"Of course not!" There was just the proper touch of scandalized indignation in his voice at the question.

"Do you know a woman who calls her-

self 'Hildreth'?" McCarty shot the name at him and for a moment the man's pale eyelids quivered, but he gave no other sign.

"No, sir. I never heard of her, sir."

"Then you didn't know that that is an alias of Ilsa Helwig's, the housemaid who stole Mrs. Creveling's emeralds and jumped her bail?"

"No, sir. Is it, indeed?"

"It is," responded McCarty grimly. "And I suppose you're not stuck on her? You're not known as 'Mr. Hildreth' down in the neighborhood where she lived before we arrested her again last night? You didn't leave this house last night between eleven and twelve by shinning over the back fences and go down there, only to run into a dick from headquarters who was trailing you and get scared off before ever you had a chance to see her?"

"I—I did not." The shot had told, and at McCarty's mendacious statement of the woman's arrest Hill had visibly winced. "I don't know what you are talking about. I never heard of any woman named 'Hildreth,' and I wasn't out of the house last night."

"Mr. Udell!" McCarty raised his voice firmly, and the shrinking figure of the night clerk from the Third Avenue drug-store appeared in the door of the breakfast-room. "Who is this man?"

"It's Mr. Hildreth, sir," he stammered.

"You'd swear to it?"

"I'd have to, sir, it's the truth. Oh, Mr. Hildreth, I hope you'll realize I'm not doing this of my own accord! I hated to come and give you away like this!"

"What have you to say, Hill?" McCarty cut the druggist's lamentations abruptly short.

Hill drew himself up, and staring straight into Udell's eyes, he said distinctly:

"Nothing, sir. I never saw this man before in all my life." Then all at once he began to tremble uncontrollably. "I haven't seen Ilsa Helwig since she was taken away from here under arrest! I don't know any one down on Third Avenue. I've never been there!"

"Then how did you know this man came from there? I haven't said anything

about Third Avenue! How did you know it was near there the Hildreth woman lived? You're under arrest, Hill, for the murder of Eugene Creveling!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

WADE TERHUNE EXPERIMENTS.

TO Jimmie Ballard's joy and gratitude he secured his "beat," and the *Bulletin* made the most of its exclusive story of Hill's arrest. McCarty put in a busy afternoon and promptly at a quarter before eight that night Dennis Riordan made his appearance at the other's rooms. He was spick and span in a new suit that seemed oddly bulky on his spare form, and his Adam's apple bobbed up and down like a buoy, above a collar several sizes too tight for even his thin neck, but although the night wind had the sharp edge of an approaching storm, beads of perspiration stood out upon his brow. He walked, too, with a singularly noiseless tread as he advanced to the table and laid thereon a pair of bright yellow, semitransparent gloves.

The disapproval with which McCarty eyed them changed quickly to curiosity.

"Is it airs you're putting on, Denny, with your gloves? They look like rubber to me! If that's the latest style, you male fashion manikin—"

"Rubber they are, and 'tis protection, not airs," interrupted Dennis with the defensive dignity of one anticipating ridicule. "And if 'twill interest you to know it, I've rubber-soled boots on, and rubberized clothes under these! I've no mind to let myself in for any shocks from Terhune's machines!"

"And I suppose along with your Saint Joseph in your pocket you've got a hare's foot and one of those little worsted Rintintins like Molly's husband brought back from France!" McCarty's tone sounded the depths of scorn. "There's an old ladies' home I've been contributing to for years in memory of my mother, with never a soul of my own to get the benefit of it, but I'm thinking 'twill be just the place for you, my lad!"

"Old woman or no!" Dennis retorted

doggedly. "I'm taking no chances with Terhune and his devilmens!"

McCarty shrugged.

"It's little worry you need to have about Mr. Terhune; 'tis only the brain he tries his little experiments on, so you're perfectly safe!"

Dennis sniffed and pocketed the offending gloves, but made no reply, and in silence they started for the apartments of the criminologist.

An angular young man with the face of a student opened the door to them and smiled pleasantly.

"Mr. Terhune told me that he was expecting you and your friend, Mr. McCarty. He is just completing the arrangement of his apparatus, and he said that you were both to go to the consulting-room."

"Are we the first, Mr. Basset?" Dennis hung back, deliberately making conversation with the laboratory assistant.

"Yes, Mr. Riordan. There will only be a small gathering this evening, I understand."

"Come on!" McCarty ordered impatiently. "I want to see what's doing!"

They found Terhune emerging from the familiar screen in one corner of the great bare room which now was furnished merely with a row of chairs facing what appeared to be a motion-picture screen, and a single chair set forward and well at one side, like that of a teacher before a class.

"I thought you might come a little earlier, my dear McCarty, but there will still be time for me to explain our experiment this evening to you." Terhune shook hands in high good humor. "I see by the papers that you and Inspector Druet have followed the obvious course; I warned you against it, but I should have known how futile my effort would be. Take my word for it, McCarty, you will have to let the valet, Hill, go within twenty-four hours."

"I'd not be surprised, sir," McCarty responded quietly, but there was a sudden twinkle in his eye.

Dennis tugged surreptitiously at his sleeve.

"What is it, moving pictures?" he asked in a rasping whisper.

"Yes, of a sort, Riordan." Terhune

himself answered with a smile. "You will merely see a series of numbers projected on the screen, but I will explain them to you later. I am using the old association test, McCarty, but in connection with a new and improved tonoscope called the vibratoscope. Do you see this drum?"

He moved the screen aside as he spoke, and displayed a large cylindrical case mounted upon a platform with supports at either end, and a scale like a double foot-rule projected across but not touching its rounded side, which was perforated with slanting rows of almost infinitesimal holes. Before it an upright brass arm held a needle pointer tipped with a tiny flickering flame.

"Look at that, now!" exclaimed Dennis, impressed. "And this vibrant—what you said, sir—what does it do?"

"It projects the vibrations of the human voice upon the screen out there, much in the manner of the motion-picture machine," responded Terhune. "The original tonoscope merely registered the tonal quality, showing by a standardized scale whether it was sharp or flat, but with this amplified vibratoscope the vocal manifestations of emotion may be measured down to an accuracy of a hundredth of a tone or even finer.

"The vibrations of the voice, as you see now while I am speaking, cause that little flame on the needle to flicker, diminishing with the lowered degrees of a single tone and rising with its upward trend. Inside that cylindrical case is a large drum which contains some thirty-six thousand holes arranged in rows so as to represent a series of tone shadings covering the entire range of the human voice from a murmur to a shriek. In a tonoscope there are only eighteen thousand holes which form merely an octave. Do you follow me?"

McCarty was studying the apparatus closely, but Dennis nodded.

"Yes, sir," he said somewhat uncertainly. "I'm quite a ways behind, but I mis-doubt I'll catch up when I see it actually working on the screen. And we don't have to hold any little bulbs nor wires nor anything?"

"No, merely to listen and watch. I

shall not ask you nor McCarty to take any more active part in to-night's test."

"But just how does this work, Mr. Terhune?" McCarty asked.

"By the revolution of the inner drum you see," explained the criminologist. "I set it in motion when the test starts. If the speaker sounds middle C—which in the original tonescope makes two hundred and fifty-six vibrations a second—the line on the drum which has two hundred and fifty-six holes, will seem to remain stationary while all the other rows are continuing to move; the line which stands still points to that number on the horizontal scale, and is then projected on the screen. The numbers on the vibratoscope, however, are differently graded. In action the process is almost instantaneous, so that sound is seen at practically the same time that it is heard. Ah, good evening, Mr. O'Rourke!"

He stepped from behind the screen and drew its panel hastily across after him so that the earlier arrivals were for the time being hidden from the newcomer and Dennis whispered confidentially:

"Honest to God, Mac, did you understand one single word of all that discourse? I did not, but small matter of that so long as 'tis not my voice that contraption is taking account of! If I've only to watch the screen he can start the show whenever he wants. What was it he said about an association test? What kind of an association is it? Are we all supposed to be members of the club?"

"No, you loon!" McCarty responded with a low chuckle. "He means the association of one word to another; he mentions a word and you tell what it brings up in your mind, what it means to you."

"If it's education he wants he could buy a dictionary for the meaning of words," Dennis remarked. "That is, providing he could pick out one that had the answer in he wanted; I've never seen one yet."

"'Tis to find out what's on the mind of the person he's questioning," explained McCarty patiently. "I've seen him work it before, on the stepfather of that girl who was supposed to have been thrown from the window of the Glamorgan, only without any little recording machine. There's

Waverley and Cutter now! I wonder how many more are coming?"

A moment later the dry, precise tones of George Alexander were heard, and following upon his heels came Inspector Druet.

"Our gathering is complete, now," Terhune announced. "McCarty, come out from behind that screen. Gentlemen, you all know the inspector's deputy, Mr. McCarty, I think. This is a colleague of his, Mr. Riordan. Now, if you will all be seated in that row of chairs-facing the projection sheet I will explain the method of this little test; you will find it almost childishly simple."

Waverley turned with a subdued guffaw and a joking aside to Nicholas Cutter, but the latter did not respond, and the gravity of his face remained unbroken as he advanced and seated himself at one end of the row of chairs. Waverley dropped into the next with O'Rourke beside him, then Alexander, Inspector Druet, and McCarty, with Dennis bringing up at the farther end. Bassett entered only to efface himself silently behind the screen, and Terhune took the chair at one side, drawing a sheaf of papers from his pocket.

"You will see merely a series of numbers on the screen," he began. "They will mean nothing to you, and are intended for my guidance, but I want you to keep your attention focused upon them, nevertheless, even while you are replying to my questions. Understand, gentlemen, there is nothing arbitrary about this, for I have no authority to cross-examine you even if I desired to do so, and you are of course at liberty to reply or not as you choose. If my questions seem to you to be unduly personal, please remember that this is merely a scientific experiment, a short cut to minor details upon which we desire enlightenment and which you may have forgotten or retained merely in your subconscious memory."

"I am going to read to you, one at a time, a brief list of words, and after each I would like you to reply in a single word if possible, telling me just what impression that word has conveyed to you; not a definition but an expression of the relative thought it brings to your mind. For an

elementary instance, if I mentioned the word 'feather,' you might associate it with 'bird,' or 'hat,' or 'pillow,' or 'duster,' or 'quill pen.' Do I make myself clear?"

"Damned silly little game, to me!" Waverley grunted. "Why not 'Button, button'?"

"Perhaps that would not be inappropriate, Mr. Waverley!" Terhune retorted in perfect good humor. "Are you ready, Basset?"

"Ready, sir." The reply came promptly from behind the screen and immediately a low-humming sound reached their ears.

They all sat in silence while Terhune shuffled his papers for a moment and then spoke:

"We will commence with you, Mr. O'Rourke, if you don't object." At his first utterance a number had flashed upon the projection sheet and mechanically the eyes of all save the man he addressed turned to it, only to see it vanish and be replaced in rapid succession by others varying only slightly in value. "You understand what I require, do you not?"

"I think so." Mr. O'Rourke cleared his throat. "You just want to know my first thought after hearing the word. • Isn't that it?"

"Precisely. We will start, then, with the word 'life.'"

"Enjoyment!" The reply came with a boyish chuckle and forgetting the warning as to brevity he added: "A good time!"

McCarty, as he listened, thought it very like the graceless young scamp of long ago, and the naive candor of the admission seemed to arouse an infectious amusement; for a little smile came to the faces of all except Alexander.

"Enjoyment." Terhune spoke in a deliberate monotone.

"That's what I said," responded O'Rourke. "You wanted the truth, you know."

"You mistake me, Mr. O'Rourke. I was not commenting. 'Enjoyment' is the second word."

"Oh, sport!"

"Money."

"Debts, may the devil take them!" ejaculated the irrepressible young man ruefully.

The numbers, now, were flashing jerkily before them.

"Love." Terhune's voice was levelly impersonal, but when the reply came, after a pause, it was lower, almost reverent:

"Wife."

"Friend," went on Terhune.

"Nicholas Cutter!" This came with a smile and a sidelong glance.

"Creveling."

A longer pause than before, and then O'Rourke replied very gravely:

"Death."

"Scandal."

"Lies!" the young man exclaimed, flushing.

"Grief."

"Tony." The unexpected answer came promptly, as though O'Rourke's thoughts had been abruptly switched into a new channel and his voice was filled with warm-hearted tenderness and regret.

"Shot."

"Had to be." The fact that this was an impersonal test had evidently been forgotten. "There was no other way."

"Murder."

"Nothing of the sort!" indignantly. "It was a mercy to the poor brute!"

Wade Terhune folded the first paper, upon which as he voiced his questions he had been making rapid annotations, with alternate glances from O'Rourke to the projection sheet.

"That will do, Mr. O'Rourke," he said with a smile. "We have been at cross purposes during the latter part of the test, but your replies are significant, nevertheless. May I ask who 'Tony' is, or was?"

"My dog." O'Rourke's tones trembled slightly. "The finest setter in the county—I brought him from home, you see—and he was nearer human than anything that ever ran on four legs! He was old and blind, but my wife wouldn't hear of anything being done to him until to-day, when the vet said he was suffering from a cancer. I put him out of his misery myself with a single shot."

"I understand now." Terhune selected another paper from the slips he held upon his knee. "Mr. Waverley, can we induce you to play in our little game next?"

"Go ahead!" Waverley responded, with a somewhat uneasy grin. "It's your move!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"EXTREMELY SIMPLE."

TERHUNE'S tone fell again to a monotone.

"My first word is: 'Creveling.'"

"Suicide," responded Waverley doggedly after a moment's deliberation. He glanced covertly at Cutter and wet his thick lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Cause."

"Crazy!" The reply came with a note of defiance.

"Supper."

Waverley opened his lips to speak and then halted, while an angry red suffused his heavy, pendulous cheeks. At length with a sneering attempt at flippancy, he answered:

"Food."

"Butler," Terhune continued as though he had not noted the evasion.

"Sneak!" growled Waverley and then drew his breath in sharply with belated caution.

"Quarrel."

"Temper." He was evidently holding himself under guard now.

"Woman."

"Trouble." This was accompanied by a shrug and a leer, but his thin tones showed the strain he was under and his eyes turned not to his interrogator, but to Cutter, like those of a dog to his master.

"Love." Terhune droned monotonously.

"Infatuation!" There was ineffable contempt in the tone.

"Revenge."

"Foolish!" Waverley could no longer pretend not to comprehend the trend of the examination and his small eyes snapped viciously from between the rolls of fat which all but blotted them out.

"Blood." Terhune's steady voice seemed to cut deeper into the thick hide of Waverley's sensibilities and the veins stood out suddenly upon the latter's brow.

"Say, what in hell are you getting at?"

he demanded. "I've humored you with your absurd inquisition and your damned contrivances long enough!"

"That is a very satisfactory reply, Mr. Waverley," Terhune responded, unmoved. "I have only one more word to suggest to you and that is, 'alibi.'"

"It's one word too many, you pettifogging meddler!" Waverley sprang from his chair. "You claim that this is only a scientific experiment and under cover of it you dare to insult people with a lot of infernal insinuations and innuendoes you haven't the nerve to come out with openly! Try this grand stand play of yours on some other sucker; I'm through! Coming, Nick?"

"No. I haven't had my turn yet, and I confess I am interested." Cutter smiled inscrutably into the angry face looking down upon him and made no change in his easy, relaxed attitude. "You're acting like an ass, Doug! Sit down and calm yourself."

"Not I! You can be the goat if you want to, but I'm off. Inspector, if you or any other of the accredited authorities want me you know where to find me." He flung himself from the room and they heard him fumbling in the hall for his hat and stick, and then the resounding slam of the entrance door.

"Disgusting exhibition!" George Alexander commented with dignity. "I never could understand why Eugene tolerated such a boor! Mr. Terhune, like Mr. Cutter I find your experiment profoundly interesting. Pray, continue. Personally, I feel that this otherwise regrettable interruption has somewhat cleared the air."

Knowing Terhune's ultimate purpose, McCarty nearly choked and glanced at Dennis, who responded with an expectant grin. The inspector was eyeing Terhune quizzically.

"I shall not be long now." The criminologist smiled an acknowledgment of the older man's remark. "Mr. Cutter, may I trouble you next?"

"With pleasure." Cutter turned toward him. "I am quite at your service."

"Thank you. What then does the word 'friend' suggest to you?"

"Eugene Creveling." Cutter's tone held just the decorous touch of sorrow and regret.

"Trouble."

"Mental and imaginary, if any," he replied as though to himself.

"Weakness."

"Lack of restraint."

The figures which appeared on the projection sheet now were almost stationary, and when they changed at all varied only slightly.

It seemed to McCarty as though Cutter were imitating, perhaps unconsciously, the monotonous pitch of his interrogator's voice.

"Attack."

A bare moment elapsed before the reply, but it was sufficient to suggest a hint of hesitation.

"Paroxysm."

"Guest."

"Friend." This time there was no pause, but the figures changed and flickered before their eyes.

"Gun."

Cutter turned with an apologetic shrug to Terhune.

"There's only one thought which that word could bring to my mind under the circumstances and the only one word which expresses it is 'who's'?"

Terhune nodded in comprehension.

"Passion."

"Curios." Cutter's voice lifted in relief to its accustomed level.

"Anger."

"Rage." Was there a shade of studied carefulness in the precision with which the mere casual definition was uttered?

"Fear."

"Apprehension."

"Doom." For the first time Terhune lowered his own voice impressively, but Cutter only shrugged once more as he made his final reply.

"Fate."

"That is all, thank you, Mr. Cutter."

Terhune slipped the paper upon which as before he had been scribbling into his pocket and took up the last remaining sheet. "I shall not detain any of you gentlemen long now. Mr. Alexander, you have heard

the words to which the others have replied; will you aid me now in my final test?"

"Willingly, although I must confess that I cannot quite see of what value these tests may be, nor what bearing they can have upon the distressing affair you are investigating. Will you explain your purpose to us afterward? I am highly curious."

"Oh, yes." Terhune smiled once more. "I will make my meaning and purpose quite clear to you. You were Mr. Creveling's partner and closer to him, perhaps, than any one in this room. The words I mention to you will therefore be of more intimate suggestion than those offered to the others as guides to their various trains of thought and will cover a much wider range. I trust that you will reply with the first thought which comes to you in connection with them. Let us take the word 'brother.'"

"Dead." Alexander started nervously, and during the utterance of that monosyllable the figures changed three times on the luminous sheet.

"Will." Terhune studied the numerals attentively.

"Document."

"Ward."

"My niece." Alexander spoke shortly and there was a certain dry note in his voice as though all at once he ceased to find the experiment as interesting as he had previously asserted.

"Birth."

"Lineage." The slight, elderly figure drew itself up with unconscious hauteur in the big chair.

"Money."

"Er—capital." He wilted a little, but his head with its graying Vandyke beard was still held proudly erect.

"Loan."

"Debt." Alexander caught himself up with a sharply drawn breath.

"Marriage."

A pause ensued and then faintly:

"Orange-blossoms."

To McCarty it seemed a trivial enough rejoinder and yet for some reason it appeared to afford Terhune obvious satisfaction.

"Prosperity."

"Luxury."

"Speculation."

"Risk." Alexander's tones quivered a little, but whether from excitement or some other emotion McCarty could not determine.

"Bankruptcy."

"Loss."

"Hypothecation."

"Pledging—security." Alexander swallowed with a visible effort.

"Restitution."

"Giving back—" Alexander half rose from his chair. "Really, Mr. Terhune, these words seem meaningless to me! I find myself giving you mere definitions—which you stated at the beginning you did not desire—because they awaken no answering chord in my mind. Frankly, I don't understand what you are attempting to do!"

"You will in just a moment, Mr. Alexander." Terhune took his eyes for a fleeting second from the projection sheet. "Tell me what comes to your mind with the word 'bookkeeper.'"

"War," Alexander responded promptly and then seemed to stiffen.

"Theft."

"Jewels." There had been another slight pause.

Terhune smiled, but he shook his head.

"Exposure."

"Disgrace!" The reply came in a mere whisper.

"Lower left-hand drawer." It was the first time that Terhune had suggested a phrase instead of a single word, and McCarty looked at him in amazement, but his eyes were quickly drawn to the older man.

"I—I don't know what you mean!" Alexander stammered.

"What did Grayson, your bookkeeper, have in the lower left-hand drawer of his desk?" Terhune suddenly dropped all pretense of continuing the test, but in the tensiety of the moment no one save McCarty and Inspector Druet appeared to note the fact. "What did you take from that drawer on Wednesday afternoon and then put back again? You were seen with it in your hands! You were seen when you removed it a second time on Thursday, just

before closing hour. What was it, Mr. Alexander?"

"I don't know! I don't understand you!" Alexander's fingers twitched nervously. "I—I took nothing from that drawer—"

"Shall I tell you?" Terhune interrupted swiftly. "It was Grayson's army pistol. Where is it now? What did you do with it?"

"I—I took it home—" The voice quavered and died away into silence and Alexander sat gazing as though fascinated into the face of his inquisitor.

"For what purpose?" Terhune could not quite conceal the hint of exultation which crept into his tones nor the glance of triumph which he shot at the inspector and McCarty.

But as though by a miracle George Alexander seemed to have recovered his poise and he braced himself in his chair.

"I shall not tell you," he spoke with quiet dignity. "I perceive now that this evening's so-called scientific test has been but a farce, a trick! As you have yourself stated, I am at liberty to reply or not, as I choose. In this instance I do not choose."

"Then suppose I tell you?" Terhune rose and towered above the frail, dapper figure in the chair. "You have been unfortunate in your speculations in Wall Street for years and when your brother died and his will appointed you the guardian of his daughter and her two hundred thousand dollars, you were on the brink of ruin. Her money tided you over that crisis, but you continued to speculate it until, little by little, you lost it all. You were at your wit's end, for she would soon have come of age and demanded the accounting you could not give, when Creveling came along and wanted to marry her. She had no love for him, but he offered to go into partnership with you and you brought all the influence and pressure to bear upon her that you could command.

"Knowing the man's dissolute character and unsavory reputation you nevertheless literally forced your niece into the marriage. But your partnership has not been a success and Creveling's extravagance has de-

pleted even his once enormous capital. He demanded an accounting from you of the money left in trust with you for his wife and you are in no better position now to render such an accounting than you were when she was a girl; worse, in fact, for whereas she, for the sake of the family name, would have hushed the affair up, Creveling has threatened to expose and disgrace you, if not prosecute.

"He has been particularly abusive lately and you did not know what to do; humiliation, perhaps prison, stared you in the face. Did not a way out suggest itself to you, say, on Wednesday, Mr. Alexander?"

"You changed your mind, though; you put the pistol back, but the next day you took it out once more and this time it disappeared with you. The next day, a few hours before Mr. Creveling was found shot."

"This is infamous!" Alexander exclaimed. "You are practically accusing me of the murder of my partner, my niece's husband! You go too far, sir—"

"I am prepared to go further!" retorted Terhune. "After leaving your office you went directly to your rooms and did not leave them until dinner time. You dined at your club, played a rubber or two of bridge with your usual group of friends, and returned to your rooms once more at eleven. But you did not remain there, Mr. Alexander! You went out again at midnight and did not reappear for two hours or more. *Where were you during that period?*"

As though warding off a blow Alexander raised his hands to his stricken face and in the gesture there was something at once so helpless and so deeply humiliating that John O'Rourke sprang impulsively to his feet and placed his hand upon the older man's shoulder.

"Look here, sir!" he cried expostulatingly to Terhune. "You are carrying things a little too far! I don't know what you mean about the pistol and all that, but I do know Mr. Alexander and I know that what you are trying to accuse him of is not to be thought of for a minute!"

Alexander looked up with a faint tinge

of color in his cheeks and a sudden flash of fire in his eyes.

"I thank you, my boy. After all, blood does tell, doesn't it?" Slowly he rose to his feet and confronted the criminologist. "I did take Grayson's pistol to my rooms on Thursday afternoon; I did go out again at twelve and I remained out for two hours or more. I do not propose to offer any explanation of my conduct to you; in fact I decline absolutely to speak further in your presence, but if Inspector Druet and Mr. O'Rourke will accompany me to my rooms now I will produce the pistol which Grayson can identify, and I shall account for my actions to the proper authorities."

"You will explain here and now!" thundered Terhune, but the inspector, who had also risen, touched his arm significantly.

"I wouldn't press him, if I were you," he said rapidly in an undertone. "If he can produce that pistol your case falls to the ground, you know, and you'll get us, as well as yourself, in a mighty awkward position. I'll go with him as he suggests and phone the result to you."

Terhune shrugged.

"I do not need nor desire any credit in this case, if that is what you fear!" he said with cold displeasure. "The police department are welcome to whatever public acclaim may be forthcoming, but having alone worked out the solution of the affair to this point I should naturally like to complete it!"

"Have you one scrap of real evidence against him, Mr. Terhune?" asked Inspector Druet earnestly as he led him aside. "The pistol that killed Creveling is down at headquarters, you know. Have you one witness who can testify that Alexander was near the Creveling house at the time of the shooting? Remember his standing in the community! Have you any proof at all against him?"

"Nothing tangible that I could bring to your bureau and place upon your desk, perhaps!" Terhune conceded with a sneer. "After all, the case was extremely simple, and being quite assured of the outcome I am willing to leave the mere details in your hands. My interest in it was purely psychological. Accompany him to his rooms

by all means, but guard him well, for you will find that he is the guilty man!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

INTO THEIR HANDS.

WHEN the defiant Alexander, accompanied by Mr. O'Rourke and Inspector Druet, had departed, Nicholas Cutter rose.

"Mr. Terhune," he began smoothly. "You must not be annoyed with our hot-headed young Irish friend for his ill-advised interruption of your test. I do not presume to express an opinion in the case, but I shall await the outcome with the keenest expectation and I want to thank you for a most interesting evening. It has been indeed a privilege to have been present, and I trust that at some more propitious time you will permit me to drop in on you and learn how you prepared the word test. Good evening."

As though taking leave of his host at a purely social function he bowed himself out, and the criminologist, his equanimity partially restored by the tactful if ambiguous speech, turned to McCarty and Dennis. Basset had shown the others to the door, and the three were alone.

"Well, McCarty, you did not hear the confession I promised you, owing to the interference of your compatriot and the stupidity of your superior, but has my little experiment given you food for thought?"

"If the old gentleman has got the pistol—" Dennis was beginning, but stopped and side-stepped quickly when a heavy boot descended suddenly upon his own.

"If he has, it's no proof he's not guilty!" McCarty declared heartily. "That other one might have been left by the body as a blind, and there are about three million army pistols kicking around the country. Mr. Terhune, sir, it was wonderful! Never did I see the beat of the way you worked it out! Now, if 'tis not too late, will you be after telling us what you doped out from the association tests?"

Dennis stared at his friend in blank amazement, and Terhune beamed.

"I always told you that there were pos-

sibilities in you far above the ordinary rank and file of the department, my dear McCarty!" he exclaimed. "I will explain the test to you with pleasure. Let us take each one in order. I shall not bore you with the technicalities of the vibratoscope record as thrown upon the projection sheet, but merely give you the result indicated. Mr. O'Rourke's reckless, pleasure-loving, impulsive character was clearly shown in his reactions: 'life' to him meant only sport, and money, debts."

"He loves his wife!" murmured Dennis.

"He had no emotion at the remembrance of Creveling's death, but denied the possibility of scandal in connection with it," continued Terhune. "His only thought of grief concerned the dog. Now we will take Waverley. He was doggedly determined to impress the theory of suicide upon us, and his motive was plain; he feared that he himself might be regarded with suspicion because of his recent quarrel with Creveling which the butler overheard, and he rushed away in a pretense of fury before he learned how groundless that fear was. Cutter, too, insisted upon suicide as the explanation of Creveling's death, but that was only from a conservative gentleman's natural distaste for being brought, however remotely, into the notoriety of a murder investigation. You can, I think, follow the steps of the test in Alexander's case."

McCarty nodded.

"That was all true about the brother's will, and the niece's money, and the marriage and all?" he asked slowly.

"Yes. I learned from her maid that Mrs. Creveling bitterly reproached her uncle for forcing her into the marriage and said that the very odor of orange-blossoms stifled her; that evidently remained in his thoughts. I have had access to his private papers and account-books which proved the state of his financial affairs, and the office-boy can testify as to his actions with the pistol on Wednesday and Thursday." Terhune spoke with grim satisfaction. "You heard him admit taking the pistol and also being absent from his rooms at the time the murder was committed, although I did not need his confession; the night elevator-boy in the bachelor

apartment building where he lives was not asleep as he thought."

"Well, sir, 'twas remarkable the way you led up to it all, and I'll be waiting myself to hear from the inspector whether the old gentleman breaks down and confesses or not. Come, Denny, we'll be getting along." McCarty edged toward the door.

"I am glad to see at least, McCarty, that you have an open mind." Terhune shook hands cordially. "It will be rather humiliating to the inspector, I am afraid, but he will have to admit that he was on the wrong track."

"Yes, sir," McCarty laughed. "I told you I'd not be surprised if he had to let Hill go again! Good night, Mr. Terhune."

A drenching April shower was falling as they gained the street, but they trudged on beneath their umbrellas in silence. Finally Dennis remarked disgustedly:

"And so you've fallen for Terhune at last! Think shame to yourself, Mac! That little he-goat with the beard may have been selfish enough to sell his niece to the black-guard who by all accounts is better dead, but he never killed him! He wouldn't soil his hands!"

"No more he did," McCarty agreed placidly. "Still, it amused Terhune and there's no harm done. He most likely took the pistol to blow his own brains out with if Creveling kept his word and told how he'd made away with the money left to Mrs. Creveling and where he could have been when the shooting took place is more than I know, but 'twas not there. I'll call the inspector up later and get the truth of it."

"So you were just kidding Terhune into explaining about the word test?" demanded Dennis, bewildered. "What did you mean, then, about the inspector having to let Hill go? What man was it who murdered that guy, anyway?"

"I meant what I said," responded McCarty firmly. "And that's the last word you'll get out of me this night!"

He parted from Dennis at the fire-house and proceeded to his own rooms, but he had scarcely turned on the light when the telephone rang.

"Who is it?" he demanded cautiously as he lifted the receiver.

"Druet speaking, Mac. Say, of all the blunderers in this world that scientific—"

"I know, sir," McCarty interrupted. "Old Alexander's as innocent as a babe; I could tell that with half an eye. Did you find the pistol?"

"Yes. He's hidden it under the bathtub in his suite and Grayson came down and identified it. The old boy meant to kill himself rather than face disgrace."

"And his alibi, sir?"

"He has none," the inspector replied. "His story rings true, though; he says he couldn't sleep with what was on his mind and he went out and walked the streets. He hasn't any clear recollection of where he wandered and he didn't meet any one he knew who could testify for him, but in about two hours he found himself at Columbus Circle and took a taxi home. He remembers that the chauffeur was an ugly-looking customer with a deep scar on one side of his face and that ought to help. Come down-town to-morrow morning and we'll go over thoroughly the evidence against Hill."

But when early on Sunday morning McCarty presented himself at the outer office of the homicide bureau he was met by Martin, who greeted him with an air of ill-concealed jubilation.

"Mac—sir!" He corrected himself in belated acknowledgment of official manners in the possible hearing of superiors, but his eyes danced with excitement. "Who do you think is in there this minute, closeted with the chief?"

He pointed toward the inspector's private office and McCarty eyed the door thoughtfully.

"Well, now," he observed at last, "it wouldn't knock me off my feet with surprise if 'twas the Hildreth woman."

"What-t!" Martin exploded. "You couldn't have heard! You must be in league with the devil himself! She came in here not ten minutes ago and gave herself up; walked deliberately right into our hands!"

"I expected it, though not quite so soon," McCarty remarked placidly. "'Tis no devil I'm in league with, Martin, my lad, but I make some use of the head the Lord

gave me except just to grow hair so I can listen to the barber's conversation! When you've been in the game as long as I have you'll learn to look two jumps ahead of yourself. For what else but to make her come clean do you think I let the inspector lock up Hill again?"

"You old fox!" Martin grinned. "Terhune pulled a bonehead, too, last night, didn't he? Who do you think the fellow was who croaked Creveling?"

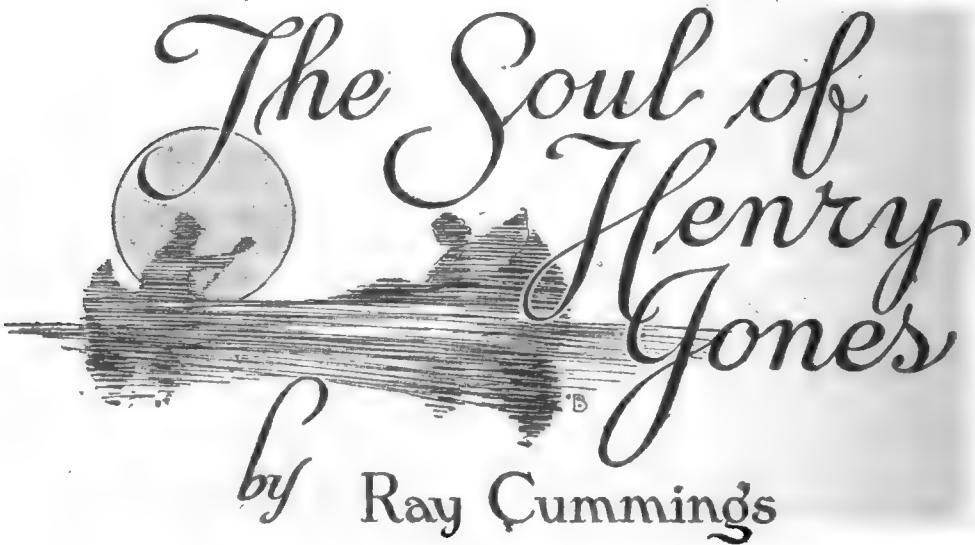
"I'm wasting no time wondering what fellow did it!" McCarty retorted with a trace of impatience. "Give the inspector a buzz and see will he let me in on that little conference in there."

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

Inspector Druet, it appeared, had been awaiting his arrival and he entered the inner sanctum to find two women there; one standing and facing the inspector across his desk, and the other huddled on a chair in the corner, sniffing into her handkerchief.

"I do not want that she should be blamed," the first woman was saying in her mild, gentle voice. "It was only a great kindness that she showed in hiding me, for you see, sir, she believed in me."

Inspector Druet nodded briefly to his confrère, and the woman turned her great, blue eyes slowly upon McCarty with a start of recognition.



The Soul of Henry Jones

by Ray Cummings

AT the age of thirty-two Henry Jones awoke one brilliant summer morning with the sudden realization that the soul in him was starving. He lay quiet, staring idly at the white ceiling above the bed, his mind groping dully with this abrupt enlightenment. After a moment of mental confusion—for the enormity of the conception stirred him profoundly—he raised himself upon one elbow in bed and looked at his wife who lay sleeping beside him.

He had always thought her pretty in a quiet, unobtrusive sort of way. He did

not remember ever having noticed before the wrinkles that were beginning to show around her eyes, but he could see them there now, plainly. And her neck seemed very thin and stringy, and the line of her lean jaw very sharp. That he had never noticed before either. The thin locks of straight black hair that were spread upon her pillow were shot through with gray. The vision of a great soft, fluffy mass of wavy golden tresses flashed into his mind—the crowning glory of no particular woman, but just an abstract picture.

Henry Jones shivered a little and fell to

staring at the round white face of the tiny alarm-clock on the bureau. Then, after a time, he found himself thinking that it was unusually early for him to be awake, for the clock hands pointed to half past five.

He slid noiselessly out of bed. For a moment he stood irresolute; then he began to dress swiftly, watching his still sleeping wife with a furtive air and feeling somehow very guilty. When he was fully dressed he caught a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror and paused an instant to view the completed picture.

The mirror showed a short, rotund little man in a light gray suit, with a narrow black leather belt that bulged out prominently in front; a round, pink and white almost cherubic face, with light blue eyes, eyebrows so light they were almost unnoticeable; and sandy hair with a tiny bald spot on top.

But what Henry Jones saw was a pair of sad, wistful eyes with the soul shining out of them—a soul patiently yearning for the satisfaction of its desires.

The little suburban village in which Henry Jones lived and worked was just beginning to awaken into life as he passed down its streets that early summer morning. He held himself very erect, with his chest expanded, breathing deep of the morning air and walking rapidly.

A girl was coming toward him down the narrow sidewalk of the maple-lined avenue—a trim, buoyant little figure. Henry Jones noticed her slim, silk-clad ankles as she drew closer. And he saw, too, that she wore neat, high-heeled shoes that were very trig and becoming. He watched the ankles and the shoes as they approached. Henry Jones was an expert on the latest styles of shoes, for he was by profession a shoe clerk. But there was in his appraising regard of this particular pair on this particular morning a look that was not wholly impersonally professional.

As the girl passed him, Henry Jones raised his eyes to her face. She was a very pretty girl, with curving lips and soft, fluffy golden hair blowing low about her ears. He did not remember ever having seen her before, but as he met her eyes he smiled—a frank, friendly, comradely sort of smile he

felt it was—and he heard his lips murmuring “Good morning,” as his hand went to his hat.

The girl did not pause, but as she passed he thought he saw that she, too, was smiling. And afterward he remembered vividly that the pink of her cheeks had deepened to a sudden red, and that her long lashes had fallen shyly. Henry Jones threw out his chest still farther and strode forward with a song in his heart.

Six years before this important morning to the Jones family, Martha Lewis had married Henry Jones. At the age of twenty-five—one year Henry’s junior—she had felt herself in a fair way of being laid upon the shelf of perpetual maidenhood, and so she had married the prosaic, plodding Henry, as the only available eligible unattached young man of her acquaintance.

You are not to imagine Martha Lewis as an acrid, designing young female. She was merely a comparatively unattractive girl according to the standards demanded by the young men of Rosewood. Like many other girls of her type, Martha was blessed, in exchange for physical beauty, with a considerable stock of good common sense. Throughout her years of adolescence she had cherished secretly all the usual dreams and romance of young girlhood. Then, realizing gradually that their fulfilment was beyond her, she had put them resolutely away, and at her father’s death, when she was twenty-four, had calmly turned to face the world with the resolution to make the best of existing circumstances.

And so she had married Henry Jones—deliberately, because she wanted to. She was in love with him, of course, just as she knew he was with her. It was not the love of her dreams, but a steadfast, practical, common sense love. Probably it was the better kind, she often told herself; and yet—because she was only human, and especially because she was a woman—there were times when, underneath the prosaic contentment of the daily routine of her married life, she found herself wanting something more. For Henry was neither in looks nor by nature inspiring to the female mind. But he made her a good hus-

band; Martha knew that, and she loved him and was content.

This was Henry Jones's wife—not the woman he knew—but the real woman, as she was on this summer morning when his soul suddenly expanded.

Martha was in the kitchen preparing the meal when he returned. He pecked her upon the cheek, hastily mumbled something about not feeling well, and going out to get the morning air, and then escaped into the dining-room with his morning paper.

During the meal he sat silent, pretending to read.

"Eat your eggs," said his wife abruptly.

Henry Jones came back with a start from the rippling little stream beside which he had been lying, and ate his eggs almost sullenly.

Martha was glancing at the newspaper. "I see the shoe factories are in trouble again. That 'll put up your prices at the store."

"Yes," said Henry, and went on eating his eggs.

Martha waited a moment. "How's the new clerk getting on, Hen?" she volunteered again. "Are you going to keep him?"

"Guess so," said Henry. His inner being shuddered at the nickname his wife used so frequently; but outwardly he felt he was maintaining his composure.

"It must have been that salad last night that upset you," went on Martha after another interval of silence; to which Henry answered nothing.

All that day at the store Henry's work revolted him as nothing had ever revolted him before. He longed for freedom. He wanted to wander through dim, cool, mossy woods; or to lie beside babbling brooks upon his back and watch the birds in the trees overhead; or to sit braced against a tree-trunk with a book upon his knee, reading poetry to a pair of blue eyes staring up into his face. Henry had never read much poetry, but he knew now he wanted to.

And she would brush back her straying locks of golden hair and implore him to read more. And then he—

"That hurts my corn," said Henry

Jones's customer irritably. "Can't you give me one a little wider at the toe?"

At dinner that evening Henry's malady was unimproved. He ate very little, seemed disinclined to talk, and equally unable to read his evening newspaper. To Martha's anxious questions concerning his health Henry guessed his "liver was out of order"—a surmise that the pink and white of his cheeks and the clearness of his little eyes stoutly denied.

He would have none of the pills she tried to force upon him, but promised, if he could be allowed to spend the evening at Williams's Billiard Parlor, watching the games, to take it when he came home in the event of his not feeling better by then.

So, immediately after the meal was over, Henry put on his hat and escaped from the oppression of domesticity into the freedom of the great outdoors. But he did not go to Williams's Billiard Parlor. Instead he turned sharply, as soon as he was out of sight of his home, and headed in exactly the opposite direction.

Now you can readily understand that in this state of mind it was inevitable that sooner or later Henry should meet the other woman. That is in no way peculiar; but it is rather surprising that in Henry's case she came into his life this very first evening.

There is a little lake near Rosewood, which during the summer months is ideal for canoeing. It was toward this lake that Henry bent his steps. The night was warm, but not unpleasantly so, for there was a stiff breeze blowing. Almost a full moon hung overhead, with scudding, low-flying clouds passing swiftly across its face at intervals. Henry jammed his straw hat down firmly on his head and strode forward with rapid steps into the wind.

Not that Henry was particularly interested in canoeing. Mr. and Mrs. Jones had, in fact, never been in a canoe together. Henry had never been in one in his life, for he was an indifferent swimmer in spite of his fleshiness, and the obvious frailty of this form of boat held no appeal for him; and if his wife had ever been in one he did not know it. She had never suggested it except once—soon after they

were married—and that he had long since forgotten.

Henry struck the lake near its upper end, where it was wildest. He was glad to find himself quite alone; he laid his hat on the ground and sat down close beside the shore, facing the wind that blew strongly toward him from across the water. The lake was rough, and the sound of its little angry waves beating against the pebbly beach at his feet thrilled him. After a moment the moon came from behind a flying cloud and the water was lighted with silver. Henry sighed rapturously.

For perhaps ten minutes he sat motionless. Then abruptly coming from up the lake he saw a lone canoe. It was hardly more than two hundred feet off shore, and was heading downward, across the wind. Henry could see it plainly in the moonlight—a canoe with a single occupant, a girl, seated in its stern and paddling with a single paddle. The empty bow of the canoe rose high in the air.

Henry watched it with furiously beating heart as it rose and fell on the silvery waves. The girl was paddling desperately, and evidently with waning strength to keep its bow from blowing around toward the shore.

The wind increased with a sudden gust, and all at once the girl stopped paddling. The bow of the canoe, acting almost like a sail, swung rapidly around. The canoe rode more quietly now, but drifted steadily shoreward. After a moment the girl started paddling again, and came slanting across the waves in a direction that Henry realized with a start would land her almost at his feet.

Another gust forced her to increase the force of her strokes, but still she could not hold her own. She was almost opposite Henry, and hardly fifty feet off shore, when she gave up again; this time evidently for good, for she held the paddle idle across her knees.

The canoe blew inshore rapidly. Henry was sitting in the shadow of a tree and knew the girl had not seen him. Another moment passed and the bow of the canoe grated upon the pebbly beach, hardly ten feet from where he sat.

Henry started to his feet. The girl was standing up, gingerly trying to walk shoreward in the rocking little craft. Henry shouted. The girl looked up, startled; and at the same instant a wave struck the stern quarter of the canoe, slueing it around. The girl lost her balance and fell overboard.

Henry leaped forward to the beach. He was not a bit frightened, he told himself afterward; instead, there was joy in his heart—a fierce, reckless joy. For this at last was life!

The canoe, partly filled, rolled sidewise to the waves and grounded. The girl struggled to her feet, knee-deep in the water and soaking wet. Henry ran past the canoe, and without hesitating, waded out and stood facing her.

"I fell overboard," announced the girl.

"Yes, I—I saw you," said Henry. "I was sitting there." He waved his hand vaguely toward the shore. His heart was almost smothering him; yet he felt no surprise, for it seemed only natural and right that she should come to him so unexpectedly and so soon. For Henry at once recognized this girl standing beside him in the lake as the girl he had passed and smiled at that morning.

And then, in a flash, he knew also that it was to her beautiful blue eyes he had been reading poetry all that day, and it was her wayward golden tresses that had floated before him and would not go away, even when the customer was annoyed because a shoe pinched.

"Why, you're all wet," said Henry.

"So are you," rejoined the girl. Then suddenly she laughed—a little silvery peal, like far-off bells at sunset, Henry thought. "How silly of us. Let's go ashore," she added.

"Let's," said Henry. "Let me help you." He put his hand upon her arm; her dress was wet and cold, but the touch made him tremble.

It was only a few steps to the dry beach. The girl shook her skirts and sat down in the grass, shivering a little. Henry took off his coat instantly. It was quite dry, and he wrapped it around her shoulders. The girl smiled at him gratefully.

"What a silly thing! I got down there at the end of the lake, and when the wind came up stronger I couldn't get back. You can't hold it up against the wind when you're alone, you know."

Henry didn't know exactly, but he nodded confidently.

The girl took off her little slippers and emptied the water out of them.

"I live about a mile beyond the point—on this side." She pointed down the lake. "I don't know how I'm going to get home—I'd hate to walk out in the road looking like this." She glanced ruefully at the clinging wetness of her filmy dress. "And I wouldn't want to leave the canoe here anyway."

"You mustn't trust yourself on that water again to-night," said Henry. And something made him add doggedly: "I won't let you do that."

"I couldn't make it alone across that wind," said the girl. "But I could easily if"—she hesitated—"if you'd paddle down with me. Would you mind?"

Henry's heart almost stopped beating.

"It's easy enough for two," the girl went on, "when the bow's not up in the air—and there's an extra paddle. The wind's letting up anyway. If it wouldn't be troubling you too much—it isn't far by water."

"No—I mean yes—of course I will," said Henry.

The girl stood up. "I'm cold—good gracious, look at that canoe; we'll have to empty it out."

Together they lifted the canoe. The water came spilling out of Henry's end, wetting him still more, and they both laughed. Then his coat slipped off her shoulders into the lake, and again they both laughed.

"Dog-gone it, I didn't want that coat to get wet," said Henry ruefully. A wonderful feeling of comradeship had sprung up within him; he almost forgot his apprehensions of the coming canoe ride.

"I'm sorry," laughed the girl, rescuing the coat.

"I mean I wanted to keep it dry so—so you wouldn't be cold," Henry explained.

"Oh," said the girl, and smiled. And

again Henry remembered afterward that her lashes had fallen shyly; and he was sure that in the moonlight he had seen the flush that came to her cheeks.

"I'll sit in the bow," said the girl when they were ready.

They pointed the canoe out into the lake. The wind had gone down considerably, and the little waves were perceptibly less high. At the girl's direction Henry steadied the canoe while she climbed its length and sat down on the bow seat with her back to him. Then he drew a long breath and waded recklessly a few steps into the lake, pushing the canoe in front of him. Then somehow he managed to clamber into it.

The canoe rocked violently, but did not overturn. He sat erect and rigid upon the stern seat holding his breath, the little paddle gripped tightly in his hand.

"I'll paddle on the left, if you don't mind," said the girl. "I'm tired of the other side."

Henry blessed the good fortune that had placed her with her back toward him. He was surprised that they were still float; and more surprised that they seemed continuing to stay afloat.

The canoe, pointing directly into the wind, rode easily. Henry found he could put the paddle over the gunwale into the water and still they did not upset. The girl took a stroke. He held his paddle as she was holding hers and took a stroke also—awkwardly but nevertheless with some effect.

"We go that way—down the lake," said the girl; and pointed on his side. Then she paddled harder.

As the canoe swung around broadside to the waves it began to roll. Henry felt a wild desire to drop his paddle and grip the sides with his hands.

"It's a beautiful night, isn't it?" the girl remarked.

Henry remembered then that the moon was shining. But he was afraid to look up; he kept his eyes fixed upon the girl and imitated her strokes as nearly as he could.

After a moment he suddenly found that he could bend at the waist with the roll of

the canoe, keeping his shoulders level. And paddling didn't really seem so difficult; and every moment as they approached the narrower part of the lake the waves were getting less high.

At the end of the fifteen-minute trip, Henry's soul, temporarily compressed, had expanded again, bigger, freer, more dominant than ever. They landed on another little beach, almost in still water, in front of a little cottage. Henry manfully pulled the canoe well up on shore and stood again facing the girl.

"My name is Elsie Morton," she said. "I'm awfully obliged to you. Won't you come in a minute and get dry, Mr.—"

"Jones—Henry Jones," said Henry. "No, I think I'd—it's pretty late; I'd better get on home. I'm glad you're safe."

The girl took the paddle from his hand. "I'm awfully obliged," she repeated. "It was a silly scrape to get into, wasn't it. I'm sorry you got wet."

"S'all right," said Henry. "I'm glad you're safe."

"Stop in and see me, then—soon. Mother will want to thank you."

Henry looked into her eyes earnestly. "I will," he said abruptly. "Good night." He shook her hand swiftly and turned away.

"Good night, Mr. Jones—and thank you," she called after him.

The plight of Henry Jones in facing his astonished wife that evening might well have alarmed a far more expert evader than he. All the way home he planned what he should say to Martha.

He ended by telling part of the literal truth but none of the actual truth: that he had met a friend and gone in a canoe, and they had upset and never, positively never, would he ever go out in a canoe again.

And Martha, when her first shock of surprise was over, had laughed. Henry never knew whether she believed him or not. For she said nothing, but put him to bed at once—without the pill, since he declared earnestly that the evening's exercise had made him feel much better.

After this first rapturous adventure, Henry's soul-malady grew rapidly worse. And with its development came a corre-

sponding ability for dissimulation with his wife. He ate his meals; he discussed with her the petty details of his business, and entered into her own gossip of the neighbors, just as he always had. But underneath it all a seething torrent of emotions possessed him, threatening every moment to tear away the anchor of his life and hurl him adrift. And Henry did not care. He did not have the least idea for what he was headed; he never stopped to reason it out. He only knew he was happy—riotously, wonderfully happy—and free—free in spirit at last.

Now I would not have you believe that all this happened to Henry's soul that first day. It did not. It progressed onward with steady growth over a period of nearly a month.

Henry developed, after that first evening, a sudden passion for billiards; and later for poker, which he told Martha some friends were starting as a twice-a-week little game. And Martha had listened to his swaggering statement that "a man must have some vices," with inscrutable eyes, and let him go. Perhaps now she fathomed—in part at least, for she was wiser far than Henry—the malady with which he was suffering. And so she did nothing, but waited; which you shall see was perhaps the wisest thing she could have done.

Henry called upon Miss Morton some ten times that month—always in the evening. Miss Morton, it appeared, was living with her mother for the summer only, in this tiny cottage which they had rented. They had been in it hardly more than a month, and fortunately, neither during that time nor subsequently during Henry's regular evening visits, had either of them needed to purchase a pair of shoes at Dale's.

About himself Henry was reticent. What he told of his affairs was fictitious but plausible. Miss Morton having few friends in the neighborhood, seemed hospitably to welcome his calls. Upon the occasion of his second visit, he had told her frankly, but with some embarrassment, that he had never been in a canoe before that first evening with her. And he was still more confused, and a little hurt, when

she showed not the least surprise at his confession.

"But I want to learn, Miss Morton," he added earnestly. "Won't you teach me?"

Miss Morton would. And so began the series of canoe rides and lessons with which their friendship developed to its climax, and Henry's soul underwent its next and final great change.

You are to picture Henry, then, on this momentous tenth evening, sitting very erect and manly upon the stern seat of Miss Morton's canoe, in his shirt-sleeves, his forearms bared, hatless, and with his hair rumpled and pushed straight back—almost, but not quite, covering his bald spot. Miss Morton herself lay at his feet in the bottom of the canoe on a pile of cushions—her golden hair nestling against one of flaming red, and her baby blue eyes looking up into Henry's face. And Henry was supremely happy—an unreasoning, turbulent happiness—as with long, swift strokes he sent the canoe skimming over the shimmering silver lake.

The moon overhead hung in a cloudless, starry sky; a soft, gentle summer breeze fanned his flushed face. Distant music from a talking machine on one of the cottage porches floated distinct across the lake. Henry looked at the girl's gracefully reclining figure with a heart too full for words.

"I love the sound of music over water, don't you?" asked Miss Morton softly.

Henry let his paddle trail idly in his left hand. A sudden madness possessed him. He leaned down and put his other hand over the girl's as it lay in her lap.

"I love you—Elsie," he said huskily.

Miss Morton gasped; she stared for an instant into Henry's flushed, eager face with its pleading eyes. Then she laughed.

"Why you—you funny little fat man," she cried.

Henry withdrew his hand as though from a red-hot stove.

"No—no, I didn't mean that. Oh, I'm sorry—really, I am, Mr. Jones. I didn't mean to hurt you—really I didn't. But you are funny, you know, when you talk like that." The girl poured out the words

swiftly. Her tone was contrite, but the merriment did not die out of her eyes.

Henry sat up very stiff and straight, staring out over the glistening water.

"I didn't know it was funny," he said; the words came hardly above a whisper. "'Sall right, Miss Morton. Only—I didn't know it would be funny."

His eyes, with a dumb, hurt look in them like the look of a wounded dog, fell to hers an instant. Then in silence he turned the canoe and paddled back to her home.

Let us not pry too deeply into Henry's feelings that terrible night. They can be imagined, but they cannot be told. He did not close his eyes until dawn, but sat propped up in bed, staring blankly across the moonlit little bedroom. Once in the middle of the night he became aware that his wife was not asleep, but lying wide awake watching him.

As he turned to face her, she put her hand gently upon his.

"What is it, dear?" she asked softly.

"'Sall right," said Henry. He felt the answering pressure of her hand. In the dim moonlight, her face suffused with love and tenderness, seemed suddenly very beautiful. "'Sall right, Martha. I was just thinking. You go to sleep."

Thus, in the gray light of dawn, in the agony of disillusionment, and with his sleeping wife's hand in his, Henry Jones faced and solved his great problem. The change—for like all the rest it was only a change in him—came gradually. The turbulence of his thoughts slowly calmed; the ache in his heart grew less.

And then, clear and shining as a beacon light this new idea, this new feeling, rose in his mind. He seized it, lingered over it, gazed at it from every aspect. And then came a great sense of rest and peace stealing over him. He sighed, gripped his wife's hand tighter, and fell into a dreamless sleep.

At breakfast next morning Henry was abnormally cheerful. Martha made no reference to his long vigil the night before, nor did he. But his eyes followed her around with a strange light, and his usually pink face was flushed even pinker with excitement.

After breakfast as he started for the store, he kissed her good-by with extraordinary enthusiasm.

"If it's a good night to-night I've a surprise for you," he said mysteriously. With which cryptic remark he turned abruptly and left the house.

The weather was perfect that evening—a full moon in a cloudless sky, and only a gentle breeze.

Refusing explanation, Henry led his wondering wife immediately after supper directly to the public boat-house at the lower end of the lake, hardly more than a mile from their home.

"I took the morning off," was all he would say. "I bought something for you as a surprise."

Into the boat-house he took her, expectant and thrilled, and there he proudly displayed a tiny green-painted canoe, lying upon a little platform that sloped down into the water.

"For you, Martha," he said. "I bought it for you to-day."

"Oh, Henry, a canoe for us!"

"I bought it for you—this morning. Don't you see, Martha—that's what I've been doing all these weeks—learning to canoe so I can take you out."

"Oh, Henry—dear!" Martha put her hand timidly upon his arm.

"I'm an expert canoeist, now, Martha—you'll see."

In the dimness of the boat-house he put a sturdy arm about her waist; he could feel she was trembling.

"I'll take you out now," he went on. "Wait—I've got some cushions."

He was back in an instant with his arms full of pillows, which he tossed carelessly into the canoe with the paddles. Then with ostentatious skill he slid it down into the water, and tenderly placed his silent, trembling little wife in the bottom upon the cushions, so that she would be at his feet as he sat in its stern.

Out upon the lake he paddled with lusty strokes, straight into the shining ribbon of moonlight. Martha lay quiet, gazing up at him as he silently bent to his work. Music floated to them over the water. Another canoe passed, with a boy and girl in it—a girl who reclined in the bottom playing a guitar. Henry—with a great consciousness of equality—waved to them in friendly greeting.

Then all at once he shipped his paddle and leaned down to his wife, letting the canoe slip forward unguided. Her eyes were wet and shining; her hand stole upward to meet his.

"Life and—and everything is wonderful, isn't it, dear?" said Henry Jones.

THIS **122nd** ALL-STORY WEEKLY SERIAL TO
IS THE **122nd** BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM.

THE FUR BRINGERS

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "The Substitute Millionaire," "Thieves' Wit," "The Sealed Valley," "Jack Chanty," etc.

THOSE who have read Mr. Footner's Canadian Northwest stories, "The Huntress," for instance, or "Jack Chanty" or "The Sealed Valley," know that master as he undoubtedly is of other settings, in this one he excels. He has studied his people; lived with them; he knows them; *understands* them. More than that, he makes *you* know and understand them. And they are worth knowing, too, the big, strong-hearted, virile men and women of the great Northwest. *Ambrose Doane*, the hero of this story, is a free-trader, hated by the agents of the monopoly—the Northwest Fur Company—because his honest dealing interferes with their exploitation of the Indians and half-breed trappers. How one by one, enmeshed in a cunningly woven web of circumstances, *Ambrose* is involved in a half-dozen crimes and disgraceful acts; how *Colona*, alone save an Indian servant, takes the trail seeking in the wild heart of the Northwest forests and the wilder camps of hostile Indians, evidence that shall vindicate the man who, though reason tells her he is guilty, love and instinct refuse to believe unworthy—all this makes a story of unusual power and compelling interest. (*Allstory-Cavalier*, April 4, to 24, 1915.)

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Beware of the Bride

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Don't Ever Marry," "His Word of Honor," "The Wicked Streak," etc.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MORE FACTS ABOUT MARY.

FOR the moment he saw only Thomas. He pounced upon Thomas, his eyes glowing pure joy!

"It's all right! It's all right, Tom!" he cried. "She's safe!"

"Oh—is she?" gulped Thomas.

"Safe and sound, boy! Safe and sound!"

"And—er—who is she?"

"What?" Peter demanded, staring.

"What's the matter with you? I'm talking about the factory. It was a false alarm so far as we're concerned."

"What was?"

"The flood, of course!" cried Peter Noble. "Haven't you even heard about it? I've been too busy to try getting you on the telephone, but it doesn't matter. They cut away the bank and turned the water down the hill before it hit us, and—great God!" Peter shouted suddenly. "Is that—is that Sally?"

He dashed across the room and fell on his knees beside the couch.

"What's the matter with her? What's the matter?" he panted.

"She fainted and—"

"When?"

"Just a little while ago."

"Why?"

"I—er—don't know," said Thomas.

"Something frightened her. She's so—

so timid!" Peter gasped crazily. "Did she come in here to you for assistance? Have you sent for a doctor, Tom? Have you sent for Massey—he's her family doctor and—"

His eye, just then, caught the eye of William Emerson. For the first time he was aware of William's presence; yet so startlingly aware of it did he become in a matter of one second that even Sally flitted briefly from Peter's mind.

There was that in William's eye at this moment which would have caused a family of fifteen to flit bodily from almost any man's mind! William was gazing at his late friend with two points of white-hot steel that served as eyes. William was smiling, too.

"Get up!" shot from William's lips.

Peter got up.

"Don't bother about your wife!" he sneered. "Her friend here's fully able to hug and kiss her back to life!"

"What?" roared Peter Noble.

"Him!" barked William, quite incorrectly, as he jerked a thumb toward Thomas Henning. "He hugs her beautifully. I've watched him at it. Hah! Even a beast like you can suffer, can you? Then suffer, damn you! Suffer!"

He took one step nearer. Peter took one step backward and stared at his partner with an excess of amazement that really was warranted.

"What's the matter with this nut,

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for July 17.

Tom?" he asked quickly. "How did he get in? What's he talking about?"

"That 'll do!" William thundered. "Stand where you are! Don't move!"

His right hand slid under his left arm. It whisked into view again, and Peter Noble, for the first time in his life, gazed into what seemed to be a railroad tunnel directed right at him.

He closed his eyes and squinted hard. He opened them again, and for an instant hope flashed in them; but it was no dream after all! He was covered.

"Now!" William said, with a quiet that was impressive. "Where is she?"

"Where is—"

"Mary!"

A shock, violent past disguising, ran through Peter! His eyes opened for a moment, and then, as a thousand thoughts and ten thousand possibilities ran through his head, he reddened suddenly and as suddenly turned pale. He could, of course have looked more guilty, but it would have taken time and considerably greater perseverance.

"Mary!" he breathed.

"You've admitted everything I need to know, except where you've left her!" William said, and his big chest heaved ominously. "Tell me that, and talk quick, because I'm going to drill you through! Where is she?"

On the couch, Sally stirred suddenly.

"Oh!" said Sally. And again: "Oh!" And to this she added: "Pete! Peter!"

Once more a violent shock ran through Peter's anatomy. The mighty pistol notwithstanding, he turned his gaze to the couch.

Sally's eyes were opening, and Peter knew what some of the others did not know: when those eyes opened after one of these spells it meant that Sally had quite returned to the busy humdrum everyday life!

Hence Peter stiffened as William asked again:

"Where is Mary? For the last time, what have you done with Mary?"

"I know nothing whatever about Mary!" Peter stated distinctly.

"What?—She was with you and—"

"She was not with me," Peter corrected steadily. "I have no idea what you're talking about, Emerson, but if it happens to be your wife, I haven't had the pleasure of her society."

And now Mrs. Noble was sitting up, winking rapidly, hearing it all, understanding most of it, apparently! Mrs. Noble, as Thomas observed with a horrid chill, was about to laugh.

She did laugh, and even the squabble of the older generation, a little while ago, had not approached the sound of that laugh, for sheer hateful unpleasantness.

"Mary!" cried Mrs. Noble.

"Madam! Will you be so very good as to keep out of this little matter?" William asked stiffly. "I am about to—"

"Kill my husband?" escaped Sally astoundingly.

"He—he isn't really!" Thomas suggested, gripping hard at the good, sane old world he had known so long.

Mrs. Noble laughed again.

"That part of it doesn't interest me!" she stated, while a great gasp came from Peter, her husband. "You want to find your sweet Mary, Will? Is that what excites you?"

"You don't know—"

"Oh? No?" inquired Mrs. Noble, with a tantalizingly rising inflection.

Her features were white and drawn and exhausted; yet her chin tilted insolently at William, and in her eyes burned the hottest, most malevolent fire he had ever seen. Despite himself, William dropped his artillery to his side and stared at her. In her own way, Mrs. Noble was enjoying the moment!

"Mary—" she all but intoned. "In her cute little pink bloomers and her other cute little fluffy, bridey undies—sweet innocent little Mary! Just like that, you know, and nothing more. Would you like to find her, Will, just like that, in here? Would you now?"

"What do you mean, Sally?" William asked huskily.

"Because if you would," the distraught Mrs. Noble cried, and her voice was suddenly wild and her pointing finger shook violently, "go through those curtains and

find her, and if she isn't immediately behind them, keep on looking! *There!*"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO MARY?

SO far as the general sensations of Thomas Henning were concerned, at least, the end of the world had arrived. There might be a day or two of flood or possibly a world-wide conflagration to polish off the job, but in all its essentials, the work was complete at this moment.

And a woman had done it—a woman naturally sweet and kindly, delicate of thought and impulse, with charity and forgiveness deeply inbred, had leaped back over the ages to the merry old time when ladies settled their arguments with large stone clubs!

Be it said that the trip was brief. Sally Noble was returning fast to the standards of the twentieth century; two seconds and cold fright was written large upon her. She started up as if to deny her own words before the spell upon the rest of them could break and set them into motion.

She stood thus, looking at Peter; and the simple truth about Peter may as well be told. At that moment, Peter merely gaped at his wife; jaw hanging, conscience pricking, Peter was reviewing mentally that devilish escapade of the earlier evening, when he had lured an innocent young bride to a masked ball and then had failed himself to put in an appearance and round out the devilishness.

But the gape did not reveal this precise train of thought. The gape and the dull stare of a peculiarly stupid man caught red-handed and sin-soaked!

So Mrs. Noble's chin went high again and she smiled abruptly.

"You're all so chivalrous!" she observed. "You're not even going to look, eh?"

"Do you mean to tell me that Mary—" William exploded at last.

"I don't mean to tell you anything at all about Mary," Mrs. Noble said sweetly. "I want you to see for yourself and—why,

she'll tell you, doubtless. Ask her about my husband? Ask her—"

Teeth shut upon his lower lip, the quality of a savage animal in his expression once more, William had finally returned to the warpath and struck his full stride.

"All right!" he snapped. "Henning! You and Noble go first! You're not going to slip out while my back's turned!"

"Dear me!" observed Mrs. Noble. "You're too cautious, Will! You couldn't drive either of them away while Mary's here. She seems to be the property of the firm, as it were. Each of them—"

"Sally, you know that I'd kill a man who said anything like that, don't you?" William panted, maddened.

"You would? If he was right?" Mrs. Noble queried. "Oh, I'm sure you wouldn't. Those curtains aren't locked, you know."

She nodded toward them, and a queer, stifled howl came up in William's thick throat. Thomas Henning gazed palely at him. His infernal gun was coming up again, now; William was unable to speak just then, yet the cannonlike affair indicated perfectly that he desired Thomas and his partner to precede him through the curtains. Thomas moved at last.

And it was all over now—all but the shouting or the shooting! Mary was paralyzed with fright; his ear fairly ached with listening for the inevitable betraying sound, and not one had come from the music-room.

Mary would be standing there, and after that—why, there would be no after that, of course. William would merely look once, go mad, pull the trigger—

"She's not here!" William barked as they passed the curtains.

"Why, she is there!" Mrs. Noble corrected quickly, for she had sauntered after for the final scene.

"Look!"

"She was there a minute ago!" stated Peter's wife.

"There's a lot more to this flat!" William observed grimly. "I know the way. You two keep ahead. Turn on the lights, Henning. D'ye hear me? Turn 'em on!"

"Yes, I—hear you! I'm turning—them

on!" said Thomas, out of his semi-hypnotic state.

The sidelights of the little private hall were going now. Mary was not there. The lights of the den came up, and William, after a single glance, marched again to the closet and threw it open. Mary was not there.

Without comment, he strode ahead—to the bedroom, the bedroom closet, the glittering little bath just off the bedroom. Mary was not there. And there was the dining-room, which Thomas illuminated, and about which he gazed with quickening pulses. Mary was not there, either!

Where was Mary? Where *was* Mary?

"She's in that hole right off the kitchen!" William muttered, as if in answer to his thought. "That's where a woman would run—as far from the living-room as possible."

Gun still up, quite as if he meant to slay Mary on sight, William sped to the kitchen and the servant's room beyond and hurled open the door of the little bath therewith connected. And he stopped, did William, and stared.

Because Mary was not there!

"Did she jump from a window?" he gasped.

"Every window in the place is locked!" said Mrs. Noble's decidedly new voice. "I looked at them as we came along. I thought of that!"

They stopped in the center of the kitchen. Peter turned his bewildered eyes from one to the other.

"If—if Mary really was here, what was she doing here?" he queried.

"Ugh!" said his wife. "Ugh!"

"Pah!" snarled Mary's husband. "That dumbwaiter shaft!"

"There's a fancy—lock on that," said Thomas's thin, wondering tone. "She couldn't have—opened that even—if she had been here—which she was not!"

"She's not here!" Mrs. Noble cried angrily. "We've looked in every corner, and she's not here. She was spirited out while I was unconscious, I tell you!"

"What?"

"Just that, of course!" Sally laughed harshly. "They—these two—got her out

while I was on the couch, fainting from the shock of—of seeing her as she was!

"She—she—" said Mrs. Noble, and turned decidedly uncertain as she strove to recall her last conscious moments. "I think she attacked me because she wanted my clothes. She needed them! She—"

"All right! Where is she now?" William demanded.

"In my own flat!" Mrs. Noble cried.

And she turned and sped to the door, and after her went William and Peter Noble.

Thomas Henning, alone, sat down with a thud. Mary was gone! Whither?

Had Mary dematerialized? Can such things be? He clasped his hands and tried his hardest to think, more than half convinced that the trouble was with his own brain—that much stress had caused some vital part to slip its bearings, and that he could no longer really think—that Mary, doubtless, had secured suitable raiment and just walked out during some mental lapse of his own! Although—

"She isn't there!" William stated, popping in with the most disconcerting suddenness and with the interesting Noble couple at his heels. Thomas arose and nodded mechanically.

"She was there, though?" said a breathless Sally. "Her clothes were there."

"Her clothes!" cried Peter, as a great light broke. "I can tell you—"

"Oh, please don't do that!" his wife cried.

"But—"

"No! No! I won't hear your disgusting lies about a disgusting thing like that, you—you immoral, indecent monster!" Mrs. Noble cried.

William laughed suddenly, bitterly. Also, he laughed directly at Sally.

"Well?" she queried.

"That sort of thing sounds queer, coming from you!" said William, who was out for pure, unadulterated trouble this night.

"What the devil do you mean by saying a thing like that to my wife?" Peter demanded. "You were talking like that before, weren't you? You—"

"Ask your partner. He knows," said young Mr. Emerson carelessly. "Don't

bother me with your affairs. I have troubles of my own. Where's Mary?"

"Da—" Peter began quite loudly.

It was as far as he went, with an evidently profane comment. Peter, badly shaken, choked down his words and stared at the door, for if the rest of them had not heard the steps, Peter had. Peter, too, was the first to see and recognize a certain maskless pirate.

"Huh?" said Peter. "What are you doing here, Horace?"

"Is that my cousin?" William cried.

"That's your cousin, Will," Horace Steers confirmed, and closed the door after him gently. "I've been looking for you. That's your taxi down-stairs, is it? The man said you were in here somewhere, and I took a chance on Henning's flat!"

Long-nosed, unwholesome, he smiled serenely. His voice was cool and peculiar too, and it brought a hush upon the slightly disturbed little gathering. Beyond this, Horace carried under his arm a tightly rolled bundle of silk, whereon green flowers peeped forth.

"Bill!" said Horace. "Where's Mary?"

"Why—do you ask that?" William choked, quite dazedly.

"She's in town? You're looking for her?" inquired the too intelligent pirate.

"She sneaked away from you, did she?"

"What d'ye mean?" gasped William, and clutched his cousin's arm with the hand not engaged, just then, in thrusting back his pistol to its holster. "Yes, she—I'm looking for Mary, Horace. Do you know anything about her?"

"Why, I know all about her!" Horace laughed blandly. "And I knew you didn't. I had the right dope from start to finish, and that's why I've been trying to find you and tell you!"

"Do you know where Mary is now?"

"She's right over there at the masked ball, Bill—dancing!"

"She—is!" screamed Sally Noble. "She'd never dare!"

"Why not?"

"What—what—what is she wearing?"

Horace smiled.

"Oh, nothing very startling or conspicuous," he said strangely. "Just an ordi-

nary party gown, Sally. Why the excitement?"

"Never mind the excitement, Horace. Give me the facts!" William barked at his cousin. "Talk quick! How do you know she's there?"

Horace smiled whimsically, as he permitted the silken gown to flutter out.

"All right," he said cheerily. "That's what she wore when she first came to the ball. I had an awful hunt, but I found it in a conservatory over there, after I missed her—before I was wise to the fact that she'd changed. See?"

"No!"

"I'll make it clear. I was there, and I spotted Mary, in this, and Mary wouldn't admit she was Mary. Well, I was curious. I wanted to know how she came to be there, and with whom she came.

"Fine! Pretty soon Mary began to pal around, as it were, with a knight in armor. They were great old friends; she clung to him like a barnacle. Then I missed 'em, and pretty soon the boys got hold of the knight and hammered the life out of him in a playful way, and—"

"Rot!" shouted William. "There was a woman in that armor! I saw her in this flat! Ask Mrs. Noble about that!" he laughed. "Ask him!"

His dreadful finger pointed at Thomas Henning. Sally, flaming, gasped an inarticulate protest; Thomas stayed her with his sudden calm smile. Even if badly battered, he was intelligent!

Matters were tangling themselves more and more; perhaps, by way of driving Bill quite insane and having him removed by force, it behooved Thomas to tie another knot. He shook his head.

"Believe it or not, as you choose, Emerson," he said, "you've never even seen the woman who was in that armor, and the armor itself is an heirloom and was never at any ball. As to the unearthly reason why Miss—er—why the girl happened to be dressed like that when circumstances compelled me to try fooling you into the belief that she was Weldon Pitt, I'm sworn to silence for the present by her brothers and herself.

"Some day, when she is safe in her na-

tive land, and you're in your sane senses, I may have permission to tell you. I don't know. But as for the girl having any connection with Mary or with Sally Noble—" he laughed loudly, weirdly!

"Rot be hanged!" Horace interrupted mercifully. "There was no woman in that armor, Will; no woman could have taken the punishment they handed that old tin soldier without dropping dead! They do say it's Sam Risdon, but I doubt—"

"Listen, Horace!" William growled. "Never mind that. What about Mary?"

"Why, she's over there now!"

"With any one?"

"With the knight in armor, of course!" Horace said astonishingly. "That's what I'm trying to tell you, Bill. I found them again. They're dancing and cooing!"

"And you're dead sure it's Mary?"

"Just as certain as I can be without tearing off the girl's mask," Horace chuckled unpleasantly. "Y' know, I thought you'd like to know, and I've been at some pains to find out and tell you.

"Mary changed her dress, but she forgot to change her hair and the big black lace scarf she wore over it. Bill, they have to move pretty fast to get by me when once I start out to—"

"What color dress is she wearing?" William demanded, as he buttoned his coat.

"Eh? Light blue!"

Only a man as strong as William Emerson could have failed to begin raving about this time. William shut his teeth and looked quickly from one to the other of his friends.

Their faces told him nothing. Thomas looked quite serene; Sally Noble was puzzled beyond any words; her husband, albeit he mouthed now and then, appeared to have attained the state of a mental cipher.

While Horace, smiling placidly, expectantly, was sure of himself and—

"I'll get to the bottom of it!" William said briefly. "Horace, this is a serious matter for the—the man in the case. For the last time, it's somebody in armor with Mary?"

"Why, Bill, of course it is!" Horace protested testily. "I know what I'm talk-

ing about. She was with him when they shook me first; she's with him now. That's the whole thing, open and shut. Your wife's carrying on with another man, and I thought you ought to—"

"I'll get him!" stated William, as he patted his gun and sped out of the apartment!

Horace, pleased, rolled up the old gown, tucked it under his arm and loitered after slowly. It was his part in life to create, not to mix in, trouble. William raced; Horace sauntered.

"The fool! The fool!" gasped Mrs. Noble.

"Which—one?" Peter asked throatily.

"You!" hissed his bride. "Don't speak to me!"

And she, too, snapped into activity and passed from sight. She crossed the hall and slammed the door behind her. Peter looked around wildly.

"Tom!" he choked. "Is there any—any truth in what Emerson said?"

"Pete," said Thomas, rather solemnly, "as Heaven is my judge, there is not! Lord! Don't you *know* that?"

"I—I—such a thing never entered my mind!" Peter stammered. "What is it all about?"

"It's—largely about Mary, I think," shuddered Thomas, as he thought of the weirdly empty flat behind him. "You arranged to take her to the ball?"

"I—yes!"

"You started something that time, Pete. Sit down and I'll try to tell you about it."

"I can't, now," Peter said hastily. "I'll have to go and try to quiet Sally. She'll have locked herself in the bedroom by this time. She does that!"

"She does?"

"She—she's probably trying to commit suicide by this time!" Peter submitted, insanely.

"Probably!" Thomas agreed, without interest.

"I'll have to go, now!" Peter choked.

He turned and fled. The door slammed after him, and this time, slowly, automatically, now that the need was all past, Thomas sprung the latch and looked about his deserted, blasted home.

It was very still, indeed, just now. Thomas faltered his way to the big arm-chair that had once held Mary in her iron suit, and settled back with a low groan.

Where was Mary? He shook his head. What had become of her? She had not dropped five floors to the street, locking the window after her before she let go, and then hurrying blithely into a blue gown and returning to the ball? No, that really seemed to strain the possibilities a bit.

Yet Horace had stated that she was at the ball, and Horace rarely made mistakes. Surely he had not made one earlier in the evening when he sought to penetrate Mary's disguise.

And—oh, what was the matter with him? By no earthly possibility could Mary be dancing over there.

Thomas scowled and shivered again. Just as surely as he sat here, Mary had been in the music-room—Mary had attacked Sally Noble—Mary, with the curtain wrapped about her, had watched him carry Sally to the couch.

Why, up to the very second of Bill's entrance, he had been talking with Mary! Unless he conceded his own stark madness, nothing could efface that simple fact.

And, there in the blessed solitude, the more Thomas pondered the matter the less was he inclined to admit any element of brain defect on his own part. With the utmost lucidity he recalled every minute and fraction of minute that had passed since Bill's arrival.

To leave, Mary must have passed through this room. Well, whatever the excitement, no young woman in—well, pink bloomers, if Sally had been accurate—could possibly have walked through unobserved and attained the hallway! That much was established fact; Mary had not left!

And, on the other hand, was the equally established fact that Mary had left, the simple proof of this being the certainty that Mary was not there now. They had probed every nook without finding any trace of Mary. So, to sum up, Mary was in the flat, and Mary was not in the flat, solely because she could and could not be either of these things.

It was puzzling, of course. It caused Thomas, after ten full minutes, to emit a little squeal of exasperation, not altogether unmixed with terror. Unless Horace actually was right, unless Mary had discovered the fourth dimension in there, and along it made her way to the ball across the street, picking up a wardrobe in some little fourth dimensional shop along the way, Mary Emerson, one of the sweetest girls alive, had been driven by sheer force of malevolent influences into thin air!

Nonsense? Doubtless, but it appealed to Thomas for a minute as the only possible solution. He sat up and gripped the upholstered arms of his chair.

He gulped once or twice and tried to stabilize the reeling brain. He could not. That was no answer at all, of course, but—there was no other answer.

Mary was gone! That was all—Mary was gone! Gone! Yes—gone!

"Tom," said Mary, as her head popped through the music-room curtains.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHEN KNIGHTS WERE BOLD.

WELL indeed was it for Thomas Henning at that moment that the architect had specified thick walls and doors for the Cypria apartment building. That shriek must have penetrated anything less substantial than concrete, as Thomas shot out of his chair and stood glaring at the curtain shrouded apparition.

She was not there, of course. And still, he could have sworn that he saw her, and that she had called his name and—

"Mary! Are you—there?" Thomas faltered.

Mary did not even heed the question.

"Did he leave it?" she demanded eagerly.

"Eh? Who? Leave what?" Thomas managed.

"Billy! Billy! The bag, of course!" Billy's wife cried, impatiently and in the most matter of fact way—and quite as if, these last ten or fifteen seconds, she had not gathered her component atoms out of space and resolved them into bride again!

"I—didn't see any bag!" said Thomas.
 "What bag?"

"Mine!" Mary nearly whined. "He had it in his hand when he came in, didn't he?"

"No!"

The corners of Mary's lovely mouth went down suddenly.

"I thought I saw it in his hand when he came in!" she said, uncertainly. "I was—was looking through the crack there, and I thought he had it with him this time!"

"He didn't," said Thomas. "Mary, where—where were you?"

"When? When you were looking for me?" asked Mary, and it was plain that she attached small importance to that phase of the case. "In your washtub, out in the kitchen. Didn't you know that?"

"No, I—I didn't know that!" muttered young Mr. Henning. "How—"

"Why, I just crawled in and doubled up when I heard them coming, and the lid fitted down without a hair's breadth to spare, and it nearly killed me. Never mind that now. What became of Sally?"

"She went home."

"And Billy?"

"Oh, Billy went to the ball!" Thomas smiled.

"Why?"

There was no mirth in Thomas's drawn smile.

"Well, I may not have caught all the details," said he, "but Horace dropped in with the news that you were dancing over there, right now, with a knight in armor! You're wearing a blue dress."

"What?"

"And it peeved Billy, and I believe that he's gone over to assassinate the knight, Mary."

Thomas sighed as he sat down. "He's carrying a seventy-five centimetre gun, or something similar, and he's going to try it out on the armor."

"He's occupied for a while, and out of here. We can forget him for a little and find the way to get you some clo—"

"What do you mean?" Mary gasped.

"Is that the truth? He's gone to—to shoot somebody?"

"I think so."

"And you—you're sitting there!"

"If you'll pardon me, Mary," Thomas smiled wearily. "This sort of thing wears on one after a while. If it 'll make you any happier, I'll get up and turn a few cartwheels while we try to dope out this clothing situation, but I'd really prefer to sit here comfortably."

"I didn't mean that!" Mary said, breathlessly and pathetically. "Tommy, please don't sit there and let him do it! Go after him and stop him!"

"Eh?"

"Please, Tommy! Please go after him!" Mary cried. "He—he's so angry that he may do anything! Never mind me! Never mind what happens to me; just go and stop Billy before he does anything awful!"

"But—"

"Tom, if Billy ever did a thing like that, it—it would kill me! It would, and he may—he will!" the bride pleaded desperately. "Tommy, will you please hurry and catch him! Do anything you like with me—lock me out in the hall as I am, if you want to, only catch Billy before he can do it!"

So Thomas arose.

In William Emerson's head, as he made his hurried way from the Cypria Apartments and across the street, confusion reigned supreme. There was nothing astonishing about this, of course; William had put in the most completely confusing evening of his whole lifetime; but when one is about to wreak vengeance upon a fellow man, one needs a decidedly clear head.

And perhaps the point upon which one's head should be most clear is just why the vengeance must be wreaked. There are always likely to be consequences to an affair of this kind—moments when one's whole future hangs upon a jury's interpretation of the unwritten variety of law. William's head was not at all clear, although pure rage clouded his vision of this fact.

Mary, in the first instance, had failed to meet him, in itself a very odd circumstance. Then, as he had believed, Mary actually,

had had some sort of secret affair afoot, with Thomas Henning as the party inviting death; but when this had been proven a fallacious notion, other circumstances—as definite as the flat statement of Sally Noble and her father—had pointed indubitably to Peter Noble as the underlying cause.

Mary, according to Sally, had been there in the flat, with Peter or Thomas or both; but taking Horace's statement as credible—and Horace was probably the most reliable little tale-bearer alive—Mary was not there at all, but was at this moment dancing with an armored knight in the ornate structure across the street just before his fevered eyes.

Confusing, then, was too mild a word to describe William's mental state. He stopped for a moment before the slightly open door of the Thorndyke mansion and diverted himself by snorting and grinding his teeth.

They were all Mary's friends; one and all of them doubtless—excepting only the faithful Horace—had helped deliberately to pull the wool over his eyes, but he was about to learn cold fact now.

A last instant William paused before walking in. He was cooling off, in the most unpleasant and ominous fashion; the odd sensation in his head he ascribed to a clearing brain! That was it! Weak and susceptible, Mary had been dragged into an affair of which he was about to grasp the true nature; and if it was as serious as all these precautions of Mary's friends might seem to indicate—William stepped in!

They were not dancing just now. They were standing about and walking about in groups and the queerest air of constraint and suspense seemed to hang over the gathering.

William paused a moment, here and there, to listen; they were chattering in queer undertone. They were talking about the good old feud and—well, the feud did not interest William, albeit he sought a person in a really feudal suit of iron clothes.

He peered about. He started and smiled terribly.

There they were! There was the knight

over in that little alcove, and there was Mary with him! She did seem a shade taller than Mary; William looked at the feet and smiled more terribly.

Those shoes explained it; they had never been made for Mary, because they were far too big, but the inordinately high heels made clear the slightly increased height. William strode directly to the alcove and into it.

"Mary!" he said.

The young woman did not even turn; she was smiling beautifully up at the iron helmet just then and, apparently, she had not heard William at all.

"Mary!" William repeated.

"Wait!" said the voice of Thomas Henning, just beside him.

William started. Henning, although he should have been in his flat across the street, was actually there; he had acquired an overcoat and he was pushing against William in a very odd way.

"Get out of this!" William whispered fiercely.

"I—all right!" muttered Thomas, with a strange little gasp of relief, as he backed off. "I—er—thought—"

His hand dropped suddenly into his overcoat pockets.

"Don't think!" William advised. "This isn't your affair! Git!" And he turned back to the girl in blue with: "Mary, take off that mask!"

"He is talking to me!" the girl informed her knight.

"You bet he is!" William laughed savagely. "Take off that mask!"

"Say, Emerson!" came warmly from the helmet. "What's the idea? Is it supposed to be funny or have you gone crazy?"

"I'll attend to your case in about one second!" said William as he reached for the mask.

It is possible, in that last second, that the chin, the lips, the ears, did not seem quite like Mary's, to William. This, however, will never be known.

William's hand went up. And William's hand came down more rapidly, and the reason for this was that an iron arm had pounded down upon his own.

A faint, infuriated gasp of pain came from William.

"You back right up, you idiot!" issued sternly from the helmet. "Keep your paws to yourself or—here!"

He started back. There was no mistaking the lightning move of William's hand: William was reaching for a gun! He reached—and reached again!

He threw back his coat and snarled aloud, for the gun, in Thomas Henning's overcoat pocket just then, was missing!

The mailed hand was up to strike at him. It was descending, too—and it was just there, doubtless, that reason deserted William altogether. A vicious roar came from his lips. He drew back his trusty fist and crashed it squarely upon the solid visor!

He also shrieked as a badly barked fist dropped and the armored knight, after a moment of rather dizzy-reeling about, recovered himself and came forward with a rattling, clanking bound and both armored fists raised in the approved modern fighting posture.

Through William's seething brain flashed understanding: a single blow and he was quite undone. He crouched, then. He laughed. He leaped forward, ducked, wound his arms around the ostensible wrecker of homes and tore at him.

And after that? Perhaps the conception of Thomas Henning, who stood ten yards away, may be clearer than that of William Emerson.

William, of course, was wholly mad. To Thomas's mind he had been peculiar, even as a boy, and this was the natural culmination of his peculiarities: that William was trying to thrash the very life out of a person in solid steel negligence!

Not that William wasn't doing heroically, though. Thomas held his breath as he watched. Although the iron arms were thrashing about, William had the upper hand so far. His own arms wound about the steel plates, William was tugging and straining, panting and snarling; and if his muscles held out, and there really was a weak spot in the Kratz' armor, it was almost an even bet that in the course of time William could tear the innocent unknown

in two! A purely sporting thrill went through Thomas as he followed the battle.

Other things were happening, too, though, were they not? Off there, some one stated that it was Hugh Bond, Sally's own brother—and one Joseph Watson, addressed, laughed and remarked that it was a good thing to see a Bond being licked thoroughly!

Nor were the words out of his mouth when the first speaker flamed out at him, the first speaker apparently being a partisan of the original Grimshaw clan! Yes, and now, ball or no ball, Watson had so far forgotten himself as to strike the speaker—and, by all that was amazing, the same thing was happening in a dozen other spots as people flocked toward the original battle.

Angry words were passing; gentlemen puffed openly that they were going to the rescue of Hugh Bond, openly stated that this was a deliberate plot to kill the boy. Other gentlemen, puffing as hard, opined without reserve that these gentlemen lied, and—Thomas gulped down the emotional lump in his throat and permitted the uncanny smile to reach his lips.

It would not actually happen, of course; that sort of thing never does and never can happen in the best social circles of so cultured a community as Braydon. But by every earmark of the hysterical surge before him, the great peace ball was about to break up in a free fight!

And if that happened—Thomas jumped. That crash was the armor, falling! He stood on tiptoe as a hush fell and people pressed closer and closer about the little alcove.

Really, although hundreds of people were talking in undertone, it was remarkably still just now. Oh, and there was the good doctor, who had so nearly undone Thomas once this evening, pushing his way through the press.

The hush grew rather than diminished. The crowd stirred and pressed closer—and crouching, running, William Emerson himself shot out of the group and to Thomas.

"It wasn't Mary!" he hissed.

"Get out!" gasped Thomas.

"They'll be after me in a second—I slid! Can I hide in your flat until I'm able

to get out of town? I don't know what I've done to him, but he—"

"Yes! Beat it!" said Thomas.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AFTERMATH.

THE hush became even deeper. Ten seconds hence they would be looking for William, the would-be conqueror. They were not looking now. With one last sweeping glance, William headed for the wall—for the door—for the street!

And he had made it, and they were not after him yet. He slowed down suddenly and walked across the street. He whisked into the Cypria Apartments and to the stairway, passing the sleeping elevator boy.

Two steps at a time, William ascended to the fifth floor—and with half a dozen little bounds he was in Thomas Henning's flat again, panting, aghast!

He had done—what? He did not know. There had been that last awful crash, and then, with an infernal girl in blue screaming—a girl who did not even resemble Mary—William remembered feeling the crowd about him, seeing some one lift the visor of the prostrate knight, seeing the white face and closed eyes of his fairly intimate friend, Hugh Bond!

And now he was safe, for a little. William clenched his cold hands and stood motionless. His high-keyed, overstrung temperament had found vent with a vengeance; plain, old-fashioned sanity was returning to William so rapidly now that the rush of it amounted to physical pain. A man in an iron hat, falling like that, may well have a fractured skull.

"They'll hang me!" William gasped aloud.

"Billy! They won't! They can't!" screamed Mary Emerson as she dashed through the curtains from Thomas Henning's music-room! "You didn't do it! You couldn't do a thing like that! Billy! Say you didn't! Billy!"

Her arms were about William's neck. Unbreathing, William stared at her. Mary laughed wildly and tightened her arms.

"No, Billy! No! Say you didn't!" she persisted. "Don't look at me like that, Billy! I—all I did was to go to their wretched ball! Honestly, Billy, that's all I did: I just went to their horrible ball and everything—everything happened afterward until I was—like this and—Billy, will you please listen to me? Billy, just a minute, will you listen?"

"I—go on, Mary," William choked. "I'll listen."

This is the sort of interview upon which one drops the most considerably thick sort of curtain. Let the curtain be considered to have fallen. Let us, then, assume that it has shielded both William and Mary from sight and hearing for a matter of ten minutes. It arises again!

William's long light overcoat was upon Mary, and her appearance, if unusual, had undergone a decided improvement. William's arms were about Mary, and there was a peculiar expression upon his features.

He was suffering, but in a different way, for he was happy despite his suffering. He was strong, but in a different way, for he was calm now.

But there was nothing calm about Mary.

"Billy, we can do it!" she pleaded. "We can run now! See! They haven't come after you yet, and—"

William smiled sadly and shook his head. It may be that for a moment he gazed longingly toward the door, which had not quite closed after him, but his voice was steady as he said:

"No, Mary. It's no use. I went crazy and I'll have to take the consequences. If I've killed him, I'll stay right here and face the music. I—"

His words died! His arms grew tighter about Mary. Fixedly, he stared at the door, for steps were approaching.

"Knocked him absolutely cold!" a strange voice stated, out there, as some other of the Cypria tenants made his way home. "Yes, he was senseless until five minutes ago, Jane."

And a woman's voice spoke, although they could not catch the words, and then the masculine tones again:

"No, Bond's not seriously injured—he's not injured at all, in fact. But it was a rotten finish for the ball, dear. Just when everything had been patched up and the old town—"

The voices faded away! As if a fairy's wand had touched him, William smiled suddenly.

"I didn't! I didn't even hurt him!" he breathed.

"Billy, isn't it glorious? Isn't it wonderful?" Mary cried, shakily, as her head was buried upon his bosom. "Billy, dear!"

"Yes?"

"You do believe me? You'll just let Tom and all the rest of them tell you the truth and then you'll surely believe me, Billy? You will—then?"

At such a time as this it is incredible that William should not have been drinking in every word. Perhaps he was; perhaps that slight hint of a start did not indicate even momentary detachment from the affairs of the moment. On the other hand, William was very much a business man!

"I believe you now, dear," he said simply. "Mary, could we make it, if we started now—the steamer, I mean?"

"Could we?"

"Mary, my cab's down-stairs, waiting for me in the side street. I hired the man for all night, if necessary!"

"Yes, Billy?"

"We can take that over to the junction, Mary. I can wire ahead and have a special waiting for us there, and it'll run us through to New York. It won't cost more than five or six hundred dollars, and I'd rather pay that than miss the boat!" William pursued, and his voice grew more and more excited. "Yes, I believe that would work out!"

"And—and—clothes for me?" Mary asked.

"You've got some down in the bag, haven't you? Of course you have; I remember you putting them there. You can get into that serge dress after we get out of town in the cab. There's a rug in there, too, and we'll buy you another coat in New York, if we have time."

"Yes, Billy?"

12 A

William's arms dropped. With murder and alienated affections and other crimes and possibilities off his mind, he was growing more and more himself with every second.

"I don't know whether we'll have time for the coat, Mary," he said briskly. "I have to meet Balderson—Balderson, Adams & Co., you know—at the pier, and we'll have to allow half an hour for that before the boat sails. Then I did want to see that young Jeffries about—oh, we'll manage the coat, anyway. Mary, can you slip out of the house like that?"

"This coat covers almost everything," said Mary; "but, Billy, wouldn't you rather wait and hear all the truth from Tom and Sally and Dolly and—"

"No, I wouldn't, kid!" said William. "There's no sense in wasting time like that, Mary. I believe you now, and I'm never going to doubt you again; it doesn't pay. I wonder if there's any stationery in that table drawer."

"Hah! Here's a pad! Where's my fountain pen?" demanded William, and glanced at his watch and all but ripped the cap away. "I want to leave a note for Tom, Mary, but it'll have to be short and sweet! Yes, it'll have to be almighty-short and sweet, if we're ever going to make connections."

"Mary, you get that telephone directory, will you, and look up the railroad offices and see if the traffic manager has a special wire, and if he has, jot it down for me, dear. Now—lemme see!"

When they had extracted Hugh Bond from his iron casing and ascertained that his anatomy was quite intact, and his life expectation as promising as before—when the ball, despite the two or three dozen optimistic souls who insisted on clinging to the spirit of the evening and remaining to dance, had broken up in hot, spiteful confusion—when it became quite apparent that there was nothing more to add to his present store of knowledge, Thomas Henning drifted out of the Thorndyke mansion and wandered aimlessly back to his little desecrated flat.

He was entirely cool, now, and very so-

ber. The very worst had not happened; practically everything else possible had happened. That, broadly, was the situation.

He glanced about his living-room and found no sign of William; he smiled bitterly. William was hiding, back there somewhere; farther back, although William did not know it, William's wife was also hiding.

"Come out, Bill!" Thomas called weakly, as, exhausted, he dropped into the big armchair.

William did not immediately respond. Thomas shrugged his shoulders and stared at the floor for a little.

Very swiftly, such was his selfish nature, the broad aspect of the disaster was vanishing; the immediate implication of himself in this evening and its consequences bore down upon Thomas. Largely, it was all his own fault! If he had never elected to save Mary, nothing at all would have happened.

Although Mary, too, had been to blame—Mary and her infernally jealous husband.

Thomas knit his fingers and stared harder. Thus far, to-night, he had assumed too much blame.

Well, he was done with all that now. Yes, sir, he was done with all that!

He had sighed over the vanished Mary until Peter Noble—yes, Peter, who had been the real cause of all this—had felt called upon to rebuke him.

Thomas smiled wanly at the floor. He had erred as to his own feelings this afternoon; he saw the light now: if the *next* year, or even the next ten years dragged along without permitting him even a single glimpse of Mary, not one complaint would ever leave his lips. There are things, there are people, however lovely, of whom one gets enough!

Thomas knit his fingers and nodded at the medallion in the center of the nearest rug. He had erred; he had paid. How much more was he to pay?

That the idiotic feud really should be allowed to blaze out again seemed impossible. With care and patience, to-night, to-morrow, thereafter, the exciting causes of

its renewal would have to be explained away, and by himself.

People might have been slightly demented this evening; they would not remain that way. They would begin to think.

Hayes, for example, would come to Thomas again, or send for Thomas, and demand the truth, down to the last detail, and Thomas would have to tell it.

Sally Noble, if he knew Sally's capacity for probing, would reenter the fray and demand the truth—the cold, real truth, and Thomas would have to tell it.

Sally's father, coming to his senses, would work his way back to Thomas for the fullest particulars of the ghastly slurs that had been cast in his daughter's direction, and it would be up to Thomas to furnish more of the truth.

And Weldon Pitt's father, and Weldon himself, were bound to demand of Thomas—Thomas's head came up with a jerk! He'd be hanged if he'd take the job of explaining it all, single handed and unsupported!

Why, if he tried to work out a lie that would still keep Mary covered, if he even told the truth without Mary at hand to verify it, they'd lock him up as a maniac!

No, whatever their plans, individual or collective, might be at this moment, William and Mary would simply have to cancel them and remain right here in Braydon until the mess was cleared up and Thomas himself corroborated. That much was dead sure: if either or both of them missed fifty steamers, they'd have to favor Braydon with their society until this was all over satisfactorily; and by way of a good beginning it behooved Bill and his bride to get together at once and smooth away any slight misunderstanding that might seem to yawn between them. Thomas arose with a scowl.

"Bill!" he called again. "It's all right now. You can come out. They're not looking for you."

Bill declined to answer. Thomas thrust his hands in his pockets and sneered. That, to be sure, was the way with most of these fire-eaters! Throw one good scare into them and fright paralyzed them completely.

Bill, perchance, was enjoying a faint of his own back there. Well, Thomas would rouse him.

"Bill, you poor dub!" he called. "Pull yourself together and come out. I want to talk to you!"

Still Bill gave no evidence of his presence.

"Say, William! Mary, your wife, is hiding, too, not more than forty feet from you! There, dog-gone you! I guess that that will bring you out!"

The guess, however, was wholly incorrect. Not so much as the scrape of a foot betrayed the presence of William. Thomas flushed quite angrily; any one may be scared for a while, of course, but—Thomas halted his march toward the curtains and listened.

It was his very clear impression that the Noble door across the hall had opened. Ah, yes, it had, for he caught Sally's voice:

"All right! I'll believe that when I hear it from Mary herself, Peter. No—never mind Tom's story. I'll hear Mary—"

The elevator gate rattled. With a click the door across the hall seemed to close again as Sally, and doubtless Peter as well, retreated. Thomas, with his ear against his own door, suspected that he had found the reason in the voice that sounded from down the corridor—indubitably Hayes's voice this time:

"Very well, my dear! We'll find that out from Mary herself, then. Yes, I insist on that. Even in justice to Thomas, I insist on that. Mary will clear him or condemn him."

Dolly spoke hastily, although Thomas could not catch the words. Her father's voice came again.

"Well, that is what Mary Emerson must and will settle for us!" he said very flatly.

Thomas choked. That—that was his life's happiness, turned into a couple of short sentences, and with its fate hanging upon matters which only Mary could verify. Thomas straightened up and then started anew; while he might possibly be in error, he would have staked his last dollar that this latest voice was Henry Bond's—cold and angry, but still well controlled.

(The end.)

"Not prepared to start this warfare again definitely, Hayes, until I am certain that it has not been stirred up by a deliberate plot. Henning and the Lawson girl and her husband, if they are really involved, will between them—"

Thomas heard no more. Thomas was speeding across his living-room, to haul them out bodily, appearances or no appearances. He has estimated, so far as he had estimated the thing at all, that William and Mary would have an hour or so in which to struggle back to the old affectionate understanding of one another.

But the whole proposition of Mary's vital assistance, instead of postponing itself until to-morrow, was about to rattle down around Thomas's ears inside of five minutes—and the reconciliation of William and Mary would have to be about the swiftest affair of the kind on record.

These things settled, Thomas collided with the heavy table in the living-room and stopped quite suddenly. He recovered himself, breathing rapidly; as loudly as he dared, he shouted:

"Say! Bill—Mary! Both of you! Come out here quick! I need you both and—"

His eyes, which had dropped to the table, squinted strangely at the little memorandum pad. It had been blank at his last sight of the thing, but two or three lines were scrawled across it now in a bold, square hand he remembered even from the old schooldays. Gasping, Thomas stooped and read:

Mary and I have made up. Gone now. Everything O. K. Never try a thing like that again. See you in about a year. BILL.

"Huh—what? Gone now! Gone—well, say!" gulped Thomas, as he clutched the little sheet. "Here, I—I—won't stand for that! I—can't do this thing all alone! I—hey!"

He glared at the silent curtains. His vision seemed to penetrate them and the walls beyond, revealing only terrific, utter emptiness.

At the door, as had happened before that evening, some one knocked sharply!

Teach: Pirate De Luxe

by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne



THE first of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's series of stories detailing the adventures of "Teach: Pirate De Luxe," was printed in the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*, issue of May 22. One will appear in each of our issues throughout the summer months. While each story is complete in itself, all are concerned with the adventures of that likable blackguard, Captain Teach—descendant of the notorious pirate Blackbeard—and charming Mary Arncliffe.

XIV—THE CHINESE

"THEY don't steam away," said Teach, "because I have got some essential part of the machinery of each on board the Littondale here—cylinder-heads mostly. They don't do any dashing escapes in their boats because I've left them no boats. They don't squawl by wireless, because I've dumped all their wireless tackle over into the ditch.

"One genius certainly did start to catch seagulls and set up a sort of pigeon-post, but I hanged him—or rather our Mr. Pickles did—and that branch of enterprise seems to have dropped. Now what do you think of it?"

"Might give me a match," said Lord Raisghyll.

"I've French ships there, Danish, Spanish, American, and British. But they're mainly Red Ensign. I might have had Chinese, but the only Chink I chased

thought she could get away, so I had to sink her."

"About two dozen all told?" his lordship mumbled between puffs at a cigarette that was rolled too tight.

"Thirty-one. Mostly big ships with valuable cargoes. I never did fancy gambling for coppers, Raisghyll."

"No, you'd always expensive tastes. I bet you a dinner once about something at Brown's, and lost. You ordered it. The blessed feed cost me fifteen pounds a head."

"Why kick? You could afford it, and it was a jolly good dinner. It was a heap better meal than you've brains or taste to order for yourself. Lord, man! Don't those ships look a pack of fools all strung head and tail in two rows, like a lot of horses going to a fair?"

"Yes, you've a pretty wit in piracy. Got it from Great-grandpapa Blackbeard,

I suppose. His idea of humor, if I remember my history, was firing off his pistols underneath the table during breakfast, and shouting with laughter when he bagged somebody's knee-cap.

"I hate a man who's funny before lunch. What are the front members of those two strings of ships moored to?"

"A sunk timber-boat apiece, with a bridle from head to stern. They make capital breakwaters. They haven't moved a quarter of a degree since I stuck them there.

"Rum, you've had no callers."

"Not a bit rum. The steam-lanes across the seas take up precious little more room than the railroads do on a land continent. A steamboat always keeps narrowly to her steam-lane, unless the master's drunk.

"Anyway, she does not get off it a second time, because that skipper gets fired by the office when he lands ashore for the unforgivable crime of being too long between ports. The 'delayed on voyage' tale is quite out of date, these days."

"But you've forgotten the sailing-ships. They've come into their own again, poor old dears, since tonnage got so short."

"No, I haven't, Mr. Newspaper Reader. But there are mighty few of them at sea because there are mighty few available officers with enough seamanship to sail them. Dash my wig! I've done a spell on a full-rigger myself as a kid, but I've been so long in steam that I wouldn't care to tackle putting one about to-day.

"It's like billiards: one always remembers a bit about the game, but one soon gets out of practise. However, your wind-jammers are much like the power craft. They don't make a board here and a board there just promiscuously over the face of the oceans. Winds are mapped out these days, and you can generally prick off a windjammer's course on a chart before she leaves port, with reasonable accuracy.

"She'll make her southing here, and get away to the east'ard there. But she explores no unknown seas. Not she. Old barky sticks to her lanes just like her betters. Now this patch here is outside all the lanes."

"Sort of oasis, eh?"

"It's a backwater, that's crossed by the

road to nowhere. Even sea-rivers miss it, and you find them most everywhere. You can tell that by the weed.

"Look at those tangles of bubbly yellow stuff floating on Reckitt's blue water. By Jove, Raisghyll, isn't that Portuguese man-o'-war a beauty? I don't know what the fancy name for them is, but that's what we sailormen always call them. I always say they're the prettiest thing that sails on all the seas."

"Prefer Loch Fyne herrings myself," said his lordship, who was above all things a practical man. He took a last puff at his cigarette, chucked the stump on to a garden of the amber weed, and added the rubric, "Fried. Sell for you, Teddy, my lad, your young woman hooking it. Marriage would have steadied you."

"Yes," the pirate agreed. "It doesn't look as if I shall marry at present. I thought I had her on that old nitrate bark. Who'd have guessed that a Brazilian cruiser would lose her reckoning and blunder in exactly there.

"Good Lord, that tub's beat was two hundred miles to the southward of where we were! A dorky called Smith's her captain, and he always was a rotten navigator. But two hundred miles off her course! Did you ever hear of such stinking luck?

"I'd half a mind to stop and fight her. She's armored, of course, but one could bet on her people not being able to shoot for nuts, and my beauties can lay a gun straight, by gad, with any one on the seas. But I couldn't go and loose hell into a ship with Mary on board."

"Observe the sentimental pirate," said Lord Raisghyll. "Love before dooty."

"You ass, you'd have done the same yourself. This isn't the navy. Well, let's get on with the washing. What about it?"

"I'm unofficially commissioned by high authority, as I've told you before, to point out that you're a damned nuisance to creation, politically, and every other way."

"I've gathered that from the papers. My sacred Irish flag has set all you scum of politicians by the ears the world over."

"It has. It's also saved your bacon. But for that piece of infernal impudence

we'd have had you rounded up, my man, and wiped out months ago. We'll do it yet if you continue to be a nuisance, and blow the consequences."

Admiral Teach rammed tobacco into his big, black pipe. "You might," he agreed thoughtfully, "and again you mightn't. Luck's a lot to do with it. I've had a record run in the piracy business, and only come against two near shaves."

"Which were those?"

The pirate fingered his clipped ear, and laughed dryly. "If you don't know—and really I'm surprised you don't, but extremely pleased—I sha'n't tell you now. If ever we get back to Brown's again you shall have the yarn over a good dinner. But for the present you're the ambassador of the British Government, and I'm Admiral commanding the enemies' fleet."

"You're a plain, common pirate."

"Oh, that's only between ourselves. But the trick that got me away before may come in handy again, and I've a score of other tricks up my sleeve to turn to the same pious end. Yes, by gad, it's not the job for a fool, bucking against the armed fleets of all the world with one tin-pot seventeen-hundred-ton tramp that never steamed above thirteen-point-eight."

Lord Raisghyll noted the man's vanity, but did not comment on it directly.

"You're wrong about my being an ambassador or anything of the kind," he said. "As I told you squarely from the first, I'm here entirely in an unofficial capacity, just as I was when we had that game on St. Kilda. I can tell you I got into pretty hot water over that, too."

The pirate rubbed the bowl of his pipe against the side of his predatory nose. "But seeing that you are here now, one gathers you stayed out of jail for aiding and abetting, or whatever it was. As a cabinet minister presumably you would—if you answered questions successfully. I'd have given a bit, Raisghyll, to have been behind the curtain when the P. M. or whoever your immediate boss may be, put you through your facings."

"Oh, he tried to, all right."

"How did you work it then?"

"Told him to go to hell," said his lord-

ship shortly, and added, very much *sotto voce*, "The little cad!"

"Tut!" said Admiral Teach.

"Precisely. Tut! I'm useful, and they can't get along without me. Also, I don't care a dead match for office, or black looks, or salary, or promotion, or any other kind of loot, and they know that, too. Otherwise they'd cheerfully send me to the guillotine about five days a week."

The pirate touched his cap respectfully.

"Floreat Etona! Raisghyll, you're a big man. Why the devil doesn't Great Britain have the sense to employ more of you fellows who've got the motto of: 'Do it and let 'em howl' when they see a thing's what the country needs."

"I say, though, we're drifting off the course. You came here to arrange either about my hanging or settling me down on a farm."

"It 'll have to be an uncommon, quiet farm, then. Say, somewhere at the back of the Argentine. You can't help that nose, I suppose, but, hang it, man, why did you mark your ear like a sheep's? You're so infernally distinctive."

"I suppose a ranch in Greenland or a nice quiet bungalow in Kerguelen wouldn't suit you? It's a solid fact that you'll have to keep out of the limelight for the next six years whatever happens."

"Deal's off, then," Teach snapped. "Either I'm going to have total amnesty, or you aren't rid of me."

"And that's that," said Lord Raisghyll. "As we don't seem to be getting any forwarder, what about a whisky and soda? I hate talking."

An ancient steamship with barbaric excrescences climbed leisurely out of the horizon that afternoon, worked up to windward of the Littondale, and hung there among masses of yellow weed.

The sun beat upon her. The pirate crew lifted their noses and sniffed significantly. There was no mistaking that sour chemical smell which drifted down to them.

"The Cryptol Syndicate's Chinese," Teach commented. "Wish they were Swedes, or Choctaws. I am always a bit doubtful about Chinese."

"Mr. Gregor McGregor Murgatroyd seems to be keeping his word. I very nearly hanged him."

"I wish you had. The fellow's a shirker. Also he's the kind of war-profitteer who's responsible for all the unrest now apparent at home."

"A public school man, too, who ought to have played the game, curse him! But he'll keep faith with you, because there's money in the deal if he does."

"And a sudden end to his trading if he doesn't. I've got him cooped up ready. He's had that drummed into him pretty deeply. The way our affable Mr. Pickles took his measure for a hemp necktie was positively ghoulish."

"It's not my affair, of course, what those Chows do with the ships once they've paid for them, but do you think, in view of civilization's present excitement over my small doings, they've a cat's chance of getting away with them?"

"I was attaché once at Pekin, Teddy, and saw quite a bit of the Chinese at home. He's a straight man, and his spoken promise and his written bargain are both absolutely reliable in a business deal. He'll disembowel himself rather than break them. Rather a contrast with some of our own friends' little commercial habits, isn't it?"

"Also the Chinese is a nailer at business. If he's bought your ships, he'll pay for them, and he'll realize on them at a big profit. Don't ask me how. But you may take it for granted he'll realize. What about going across to pay a call?"

"I've decided to wait for them to come to me."

"Then you'll wait certainly a week, and probably a fortnight. That suit you? There's no indecent hurry about the Asiatic."

"U-m!" said the pirate. "You're the expert. We'll call away a boat, and go look-see. I'm the Occidental all the time, and don't waste minutes, much less weeks. But I don't admit the Oriental is ahead of me in honesty."

Lord Raisghyll fumbled at his pocket for a cigarette, and chuckled broadly: "My aunt! What a title for one of those writing chaps: 'The Honest Pirate'!"

Teach stormed at him: "Why not? Between ourselves, a pirate I am, neither more nor less. But can you show me a place where I've ever broken my word? I'm sure you can't. Do my crew ever complain I've done them in the eye? They'll tell you I'm a grasping hound, I don't doubt, but they'll tell you, too, I always stick exactly to my bargain."

"And then there's the matter of that girl. You may come across Mary Arncliffe some day, Raisghyll. If you do, ask her how many men in my position would have treated her as well as I did. Dammit, man, give me credit for the small ounce of virtue I do possess."

"I beg your pardon, Teddy. I was only pulling your leg. But in return I'll tell you what the committee of Brown's said when the question came up about kicking you out of the club. They decided you were one of the few gentlemen we had among the members."

"And as we have such a heap of the other sort, we voted unanimously to keep you on as a member, and only hoped incidentally you wouldn't do it again."

"Oddly enough, when I was in New York, I looked in at the Porterhouse. I'm not a member of the committee there, of course, but a chap who was on told me that quaintly enough they'd passed practically the same resolution about you."

"Hullo, here's Jones to tell us that your boat is blocking the way at the front-door steps. Come along and I'll help you talk Chinese."

"They've brought more local color with them than their chemical smell," Teach commented as his spruce, well-manned gig put them across. "That packet was Clyde-built. Curious how a Chink can give a touch of the Yangtse junk to even tough north-country steel."

The visitors were received at the head of the gangway by a stout, pig-tailed Chinese in extremely dirty dungaree, with a fat, flat, unemotional face, and pig eyes set sidewise.

"You greaser, eh?" Admiral Teach inquired, after the manner of the sea. He waved a comprehensive arm to indicate the thirty-one impotent steamships strung out

in the two long lines among the yellow weed. "Makee walkee: can do?"

"I'm a qualified engineer, if that's what you mean. Full chief's ticket and all the rest of it. I'll tell you about the makee-walkee when I know how much they're damaged.

"By the way, may I introduce myself—Mr. Li Chang. The chief on board here is down with a touch of malaria, so I'm taking his watch to keep my hand in. I'm really the company's shore superintendent."

"Oh!" said Teach, for once in his brazen life taken aback.

Lord Raisghyll chuckled.

"And you, I suppose, are Admiral Teach? You see, I know your published description, and, if you'll pardon me, that clipped ear. Captain Yuan Sin is in command of the ship, of course, as Mr. McGregor will doubtless have instructed you. He speaks Chinese and German. I speak a little English, if you prefer that."

Mr. Li Chang showed no emotion of interest. For all the animation that appeared on his yellow face it might have been molded out of blobby putty, and the voice that issued from it have been supplied by a gramophone—Mr. Li Chang put his hands inside his sleeves and bowed. "Lovely weather we're having."

Teach's dark face grew still darker with the flush that rose under its skin. There was something about this bland Celestial that he objected to abominably. But there was nothing so far that he could resent openly.

He tried to scowl down Lord Raisghyll with singular want of success. That nobleman, as every one knows, is singularly careless of who he offends when amusement overtakes him. (You will remember of course the scandal his snigger occasioned in a solemn House of Lords over the archbishop's trouble.)

"And I think," Mr. Li Chang added in his pleasant, educated voice, "that the rain will keep off for at least another day. As a resident, admiral, in this charming spot, can you recommend the fishing?"

Lord Raisghyll thought that his friend had been baited enough, and though he was of opinion that Teach was, as a rule, very

well able to take care of himself, this time came to the rescue.

"I'm afraid," said he, "there are only coarse fish here, and they are rather slow in coming to the hook. But I'm sure that if negotiations don't go smoothly, the fishing will be improved—with the ground-bait this steamer will provide."

"Now, that's interesting," said the Chinese unemotionally. "May I ask if you're speaking now as a member of the British cabinet, or a man of the world, or merely as a fly fisherman in Yorkshire streams, Lord Raisghyll?"

"The devil!" rapped the visitor. "How in the name of thunder do you know me?"

"Does the coat so entirely change the man? I had the felicity of meeting you once across a dinner-table in Pekin, and again at our embassy in London. But neither time, I admit, was I dressed in grimy blue dungaree. I was sorry you British won over that Shensi matter."

"My aunt! You're—"

"Mayn't we leave out names?" A flicker, the smallest flicker of emotion slid across the unemotional face. "I bear no resentment, my lord, but your diplomatic cleverness lost me my official head and would also have cost me the physical head I wear at present if I had gone back to Pekin to—as you would say—deliver the goods."

"So I am now," he added in the same dry voice, "in another diplomatic service. My lord, pardon me—Admiral Teach, as you have come here, I conclude it is your wish we should get to business."

"The sooner the better."

The fat Chinese bowed. "Would you like to see Captain Yuan Sin? It is not necessary unless you wish it specially. He is merely navigator. I am the plenipotentiary."

"Have you brought the money?" the pirate asked bluntly. "That's the main point."

The end-ways pigs' eyes glinted for an instant, but the flat, expressionless face never changed.

"Yes, admiral, I am well supplied with means of payment. That's curious, but it's true. But first I wish for a settlement on another small matter that so far has not

been brought up. You remember sinking the Loochow?"

"Mail-boat from China way? Yes. I invited her to surrender. She thought she had the heels of me and put on speed. Well, she hadn't, that's all."

"Quite so. My son was on board, my only son. He was a minor mandarin. He had earned a button, whose value you as a foreign devil wouldn't understand, but which I, a failure, was very proud of. Where is my son?"

"Drowned, I'm afraid. Fortune of war, Mr. Li. Sorry, but I must ask you to cut out the sentiment. I'm a busy man."

"And I, thanks to you, have no son to do honor to me when I am dead. So before paying for those ships you have strung out there among the yellow weed, I am going to have another settlement."

Li Chang tapped gently with his heavy felt-soled shoe, and presumably the signal was well-watched for. The queer-looking steamer snapped into instant life. Screens dropped, and a dozen rifles with evil Eastern faces behind them converged their aim at Teach's head.

The Chinese was quick, but Teach was a man used to surprises. Also, in spite of his bigness, he was remarkably agile. He ducked, darted astern, crossed the decking at a jump, vaulted the rail with the help of a hand, and flopped somewhat ungracefully into the vivid blue water alongside.

A hail-storm of nickel-covered bullets skated over the rusty steel deck behind him. He did not come to the surface and made for his own well-manned boat which was hanging on to the foot of the Chinaman's ladder. To all appearance he did not come to the surface at all. Then Chinese from above shot down the men in the boat.

About that moment, too, the Asiatic steamer spat a torpedo from an underwater tube on her broadside, and silvery bubbles streaked out in its wake. On board the *Littondale* the watch had spotted these things in a moment. Her discipline was always perfect. The much bediamonded Mr. Evans slammed a sparkling bunch of enormous fingers on to the action stations gongs, and men ran, and screens fell.

But the *Whitehead*, at forty knots an hour, had only a quarter of a mile to cover, and got home in the pirate's engine-room before a gun could be loaded and trained. And mighty was the crash. It pretty nearly cut the *Littondale* in half.

Even then discipline held, and the pirates were as plucky as rats. They fought the two ends of their ship as long as their gun-muzzles were above water, and as they were firing with six-inch weapons at point-blank range, they had that Clyde-built Chinaman blown into a fishing-net and sinking in style before they, too, started to blow out their last bubbles.

Also they remembered Teach's fad—they never thought of it as more than a fad, being simple sailor-folk—and when only the shattered plates and gratings of the fiddlely were left to stand upon, broke out Admiral Teach's version of an Irish Republican flag at both trucks. Thereafter the balance of them died, and the flags were sucked down among erupting gardens of the yellow weed and the whirlpools which the dying pirate-ship belched up as she lurched to the floor of the Carib Sea.

"By gad!" said Lord Raisghyll. "You've made me tell that fellow Teach a lie. You promised him a straight deal through McGregor, and I guaranteed to him that all Chinese kept their word. If it hadn't been for me you wouldn't have got him, you dirty yellow rogue. He'd a hunch Chinese would be crooked."

Li Chang shook hands with himself inside his blue sleeves. "Am I to take that as the British cabinet's official thanks to me for ridding them of a pest they couldn't catch themselves? Do the means matter at all?"

"For a yellow man, apparently, no. For an Englishman, emphatically yes. As regards the cabinet, I'm not here in any official capacity. Probably they'd approve. A good percentage of them aren't English, and the odds are they are pleased enough to be rid of him, and don't care a match about the method. And now what's next?"

"This ship is sinking."

"That's obvious."

"And as we've a large crew of my own

countrymen, and few boats left that will swim, I'm afraid I can't offer you further transport."

"Don't apologize. I didn't expect it. I recognized my inconvenience as a witness long ago. You'll pardon me if I—"

The Chinese whipped a heavy automatic out of his blue sleeve, but the Englishman was too quick for him. The weapon dropped from a dislocated wrist, and clattered on the steel deck, and then *smash, smash, smash*, went two hard boxer's fists into the fat, yellow, flat face. The subsequent proceedings interested Li no more.

Lord Raisghyll slid him down the sloping deck, and tipped him over the rail into the weed-covered sea, which by now was close beneath. And then said he, addressing space: "Teddy, old man, I've bagged that beggar anyway. See you presently. So that's that."

Then he himself took to the water.

Blue clouds of Chinese followed, as their ship sank noisily beneath them.

In the meanwhile, in two lines, tethered head and tail like horses going to a fair, the captured ships lay strung out across the weed-grown Caribbean, each lot moored to its timber-laden derelict. At the head of each line was a refrigerator ship, which, by means of Temperley transporters, passed frozen carcasses to her fellow captives as and when required.

Boats they had none, and all their wireless tackle had been savagely smashed. Their engines were disabled, and essential parts of each had been in the Littondale, and had sunk to the sea-floor with her. Their humbled officers and crews were bitter with hate.

The surviving Chinese, in their boats, were making presumably for some distant steam lane and rowing rapidly over the sky line.

In a couple of boats twenty-three pirates and Lord Raisghyll had escaped from their torpedoed ship, and had boarded the tail vessel of the lee line. Mr. Gregor McGregor had presumably paid for failure in the manner Teach had predicted. But Mr. Pickles was among them, damp, but unduced in either figure or spirit.

"I couldn't afford," said Mr. Pickles, "to leave eight little widows all sobbing for me. Just you chaps drive all these ducks into the forecastle and slip the hasp on the doors. We won't have any more mistakes through being too kind."

"Any reason why I shouldn't now be officer commanding this outfit, Admiral Teach and others being missing? No? Well, carry on—signalman, call up each ship in turn and find out, if any one can loan me an eighteen-and-a-half collar, Byron-shaped preferred. If I'm skipper here, I've got to look it."

Llewelyn Jones, the cabin-steward, squinting more abominably than usual, sidled up, and nodded. "William—" said he, and then cringed at the sight of Mr. Pickles's revolver.

"What the—oh, I see. Of course, Mr. Pickles, sir. You're captain, sir, now, sir, and I humbly ask apology. Wouldn't have broken discipline for words, sir, not if I'd thought."

"I was only going to ask, sir, if I might take the quarter-boat and go and look for the old man's body. I wouldn't want another hand with me, sir. The boat sculls easy enough from the stern notch."

"But I'd like to fetch him in, sir, if he was floating, and give him a *bit* of a funeral. He was hard, sir, especially to the steward if the forks wasn't cleaned to his taste. But, damn him, he was a man!"

Mr. Pickles cleared his massive throat. Then he cleared it again.

"Very good, steward," he said gruffly. "Not a—not bad idea—that of yours. Carry on, spare you another hand if you like."

"Prefer to go alone, sir. He was my—prefer t' go 'lone, sir."

"Very well, b-b-blast you! Carry on."

So Llewelyn Jones pushed off and labored at the scull with the tears from his squint eyes running off the end of his nose and quartered the sea industriously. Lord Raisghyll watched, and shook his head thoughtfully.

But Jones did not find the shattered body of Admiral Teach. That person, with his chest across a piece of wreckage to give him buoyancy in the warm water and his

fierce face and black head concealed in a floating patch of yellow, bubbly weed, was contemplating the future, and giving no thought to the questing boat.

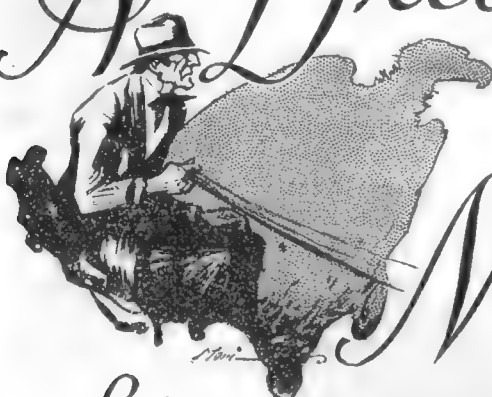
The wreckage of the past was past, and he wasted no lamentation over it. He had been smashed financially before. But a million and a half sterling floated on the warm, still weed-grown sea ahead of him, and he was puzzling himself how to realize on it. He was working out also a scheme

to get once more in touch with Mary Arncliffe.

But of the two problems, I am afraid the one about Mary got most attention. Teach, with a jerk, recognized this, and cursed himself for puerile weakness.

But after giving himself a thorough rating, and after sticking out his ugly jaw in full resolve to let nothing interfere with business he—went on hammering at a plan to join up again with Mary.

A Dream That Would Not Fade



by Cleveland Edwards

ALONG the road, which wound like a yellow worm across the flower-spangled green of April prairies, crept an ancient, long-bodied, high-wheeled farm wagon with a vulture shape perched upon the tall seat. The road itself seemed alien to the verdant loveliness of the billowing landscape, but the grotesque object which crawled along its sandy windings was a repellent blot.

Now and then a whistling, sombreroed cowboy galloped his quick-footed cayuse by it, or a man in a light motor-car passed, swinging wide as if to avoid its touch. Some stared at but none spoke to Simon Bent, whose taloned fingers held the lines slackly over a cowed, droop-headed team.

Vulture, Simon Bent looked, and vulture the Sand Hill country regarded him. His

long, black coat, ridged into a hump at the collar and falling in flapping folds down his sides, required no aid of a disordered imagination to suggest the clumsy, hunched wings of a perching carrion-eater.

A shapeless, hoodlike black hat, the brim of which rested at the back upon the hump of his coat, obscured his small, too narrow head. His eyes were small, cunning, red-lidded, and were set wide upon either side of a long beak of a nose. A mouth that was a purplish gash in a wrinkled, sun-crimsoned face, steel-trap jaws from which the stringy flesh depended in wattles, a thin neck, crimsoned like the face, crooking into a protruding Adam's apple, completed similitude as abhorrent as it was apparent.

For a quarter of a century Simon Bent

had dwelt in the sparsely peopled Sand Hill country, and for a quarter of a century his neighbors in the far-scattered farms and ranches had shunned him. They had suspected him of cattle stealing, of highway robbery, and of murder, but had proved none of these things.

One death, indeed, they traced to his door. He had shot down a cowboy in his employ, but there had been no witnesses, and Bent had told a circumstantial story of self-defense.

Before this time there had disappeared from the Bent ranch, William, a boy of fourteen, whom Bent had called his nephew. At the age of four, or thereabouts, the boy had come in the night. In the night he had gone.

Bent said that he had run away. Few believed the story, but none could disprove it, so the matter remained a mystery.

There had been a Mrs. Bent, but soon after the boy's disappearance she had fled. She had hailed the stage coach by the roadside in the open prairie, and had wept unceasingly until it had deposited her at the railway-station in Kiowa. She had boarded a train for the East, and the Sand Hill country had neither seen her nor heard of her again.

Only Mexicans, newly imported from the border, tended Simon Bent's herds, or plowed his lands for millet, alfalfa and corn. They came away, after a time, telling strange tales, which were not to be believed because the tellers were greasers, worthless, superstitious, and given to strange imaginings.

Nobody, however, spoke to Simon Bent, except in the way of business, and then the words were few. In all that open land of sunshine and friendliness, he was the one human being who was friendless and shunned.

As Simon Bent drove, he now and again turned his head with an awkward, wabbling motion, and fixed his eyes upon the rear left wheel of his ungainly vehicle. The four-inch tire was bound at intervals with thin, pliable wire, such as is used in alfalfa balers. It was slipping to one side, nevertheless, and as he estimated the chances of its holding until he reached the

weather-beaten, sun-whitened little town, the pariah-cursed Jacques Duval, his blacksmith's artisanship and all his works.

The tire held, however, and presently the drooping team drew the wagon lumberingly into the single dusty street of the village, past the forlorn line of general stores, past the one-story brick court-house, set in its carefully nursed lawn, to the cottonwoods that flanked Duval's smithy. No one hailed the vulturelike driver, who looked neither to the right nor to the left until he had brought the horses to a stop.

Bent gazed for a venomous moment at the smithy, whence came the clamorous sound of hammer on iron. Then he clambered down, his mouth working loathsomely with muttered blasphemies, and began to unhitch the horses. They shivered at his touch, as beasts do which have been cowed by the whip.

A young man who had been watching Simon Bent from the veranda of the Drivers' Hotel, opposite the smithy, arose and passed down the street. This young man had become a sort of village mystery in his four days' stay at the hotel. He had given no account of himself, and the village was wise enough in such matters to know that the "John Smith" that he had written upon the register might stand for anything in the way of a name that the young man wished to conceal.

He was not of the cow country—that much was plain from his citified clothes. He had spent most of his four days on the ramshackle veranda, looking at the whirling dust devils of the street.

It was remembered afterward that he had always looked in the direction from which Simon Bent arrived. He had seemed to be watching for some one; and when Bent's wagon came into sight, his eyes fastened upon it. Nor did they leave it until he arose from his seat and started for the public garage, which had taken the place of the stage line's livery stable when that company had given up horses for motors.

"I'll take the runabout," he said to the man in charge, "and I'll drive it myself. I'll be gone about three hours."

"Where yuh goin'?"

"Over on Sand Creek—fishing. And have you a shovel?"

"What fur?"

"To dig bait with."

"You want a spadin' fork."

"I want a shovel—to dig bait with. Remember that." He slipped a bill into the hand of the attendant. The shovel was forthcoming, and the runabout headed into the street, turning in the direction from which Simon Bent had come.

He was a lean, broad-shouldered young man, with a shock of bristling black hair, topping a broad brow. His face was lank—he was lantern-jawed, the villagers said—his nose was more rugged than shapely, and the lips firm. His eyes were dark almost to a blackness under their shaggy brows, and held a gaze that forbade questions.

Beneath the eyes were shadows, darker than the eyes themselves, darker than the natural swarthiness of his cheeks. They were such shadows as come to men whose souls are burdened with hidden deeds, or who are hard bitten by bitter obsession.

Bent tied his horses at a feed-trough in the rear of the smithy, and returned to the wagon with a metal jack with which he raised the rear axle. He removed the nut, swearing half audibly at the black grease which stuck to his hands, and then, seemingly without effort, lifted off the offending wheel. Rolling it to the door of the smithy he leaned it against the casement and called in:

"Hey, Jack! You set the tire on this wheel, and this time you set it right." The words were interpolated with oaths and obscenities.

Jacques Duval stood up from his anvil, and with the back of his corded wrist wiped the sweat from his face. It was a genial face, a self-assured one, round, fair, and crowned with a pompadour of sandy hair. The blacksmith's daughter, a tow-headed sprite of three, toddled to the door, and mindful of the paternal bounds set upon her explorations, paused.

"Run away, honey," called Jacques, and the child turned obediently. The great wheel caught her eye, however, and, standing upon tiptoe, her fingers clutched at the

spokes. For a moment the red-lidded eyes of Simon Bent rested upon her. Then they turned to Duval, who was again stooping at the anvil.

"Well?" he said.

"I told you, Simon, it was no use to set that tire—the wheel's too old. The wood won't stand up."

"Are you going to set it?"

"For the regular price," retorted Duval, going on with his task.

With an oath Simon Bent picked up the wheel as if to carry it off bodily. His foot came in contact with a bit of scrap-iron, which he kicked into position against the door jamb. When the wheel came down again, it rested upon the metal, leaning ever so lightly against the casement.

"Jack," said Bent, "I'm goin' over to th' bank and to th' store. Then I'm goin' to get me a bite to eat at th' hotel. When I git back I expect that tire'll be set—and no charges!"

Duval's eyes lifted to the long-barreled revolver hanging on the wall within reach. He did not look at Bent again, and the latter went away muttering.

Untouched the wheel stood there when Bent returned. The blacksmith was busy over glowing iron. An aged collie, long since useless on the cattle range, but kept by Duval as a playmate for his daughter, lay in the doorway.

With a whine the dog sprang out of Bent's way. Duval looked up in time to see the ranchman catch the falling wheel, which the mere brush of the animal's body had overturned.

"Simon," said Duval, as Bent replaced the wheel, "when you saved that dog you did the first decent thing I've seen you do in the twenty years I've known you. I've thought pretty hard of you, but I've changed my mind. Come over to the drug-store and have a drink. When we get back I'll do that job for you."

"I reckon you'll find out some time I ain't as bad as I'm said to be," replied Bent. "I'll go with you."

The saloon had been banished long since by voters of the State, but the Sand Hill country has ways and institutions of its own. One of the latter was the "back

room" of the drug-store, which was buffet, club, and council chamber to such as were discreet.

A sideboard, an ice-chest, tables, and chairs were there, and the patrons were county officers, including the sheriff, whose sworn duty it was to suppress traffic in liquor; the small business men of the village, farmers, ranchers, and such cow-punchers as were possessed of those personal qualities which men among men hold more important than social station.

Simon Bent had never seen the inside of this room, but Jacques Duval, rated as a business man, and a favorite, had voice there in those quiet hours when village policies and county politics were discussed and decided.

The sheriff, the county attorney, and the proprietor of the Drovers' Hotel were playing seven-up. They wanted a fourth man, and at the sound of Duval's voice, as he greeted the clerk in the front of the store, they looked up expectantly. At the sight of Simon Bent behind the blacksmith, their faces hardened.

Duval nodded to the young fellow in charge of the sideboard. "I'm celebrating," he explained, answering the questioning looks of his friends. "You know that old Ring dog of mine? The baby loves that dog as much as she does her dad. It would break her heart if anything happened to that animal. Simon saved his life—caught one of the big hind wheels off of that old Noah's Ark of his just as it was going to mash the poor old beast."

"Make mine whisky," said the sheriff, sitting back in his chair and studying the repulsive countenance of Simon Bent, as one does a familiar object in which one has suddenly discovered new qualities. He was a huge, hairy, gray-eyed man, with a short, heavy beard into which the years had begun to sift the white. Simon's eyes met the officer's for a moment, and then turned to the man at the sideboard.

"Ginger ale," he said.

"Beer," said Jacques Duval.

Five glasses were raised. "Here's thanks, Simon," said Jacques, "and our better acquaintance." The sheriff put his glass down, untasted, and picked up his

cards. "Play," he said. Bent affected an interest in the game. Duval devoted himself uncomfortably to his beer.

"Is Simon Bent inside?" asked a man's deep voice, which carried easily through the thin partition.

"Who are you, anyway?" they heard the clerk demand.

"I'm Bill Bent. I ran away from the old man's ranch when I was a kid."

"Bill Bent," ejaculated the clerk. "Why—why, go right in."

The four who sat with Simon Bent stared first at him, and then, as the door swung in, at the somber-faced, broad-shouldered young man whose bulk filled the opening. Jacques Duval was the only one of the four who had not, until that moment, believed that the ranchman had murdered the lad whom he had called his nephew, and his disbelief was less than an hour old.

The young man dropped into a chair, depositing between his feet a grain-sack which evidently contained several rounded objects.

"Come back to God's country and Simon," he said. "Are you glad to see me, Simon?"

The sight of the man whose name he bore brought no smile to his brooding features.

The ranchman's lips twisted into a purplish grimace that may have been meant for a grin.

"You bet I be, Bill," he cackled. "I reckon it's time you come back and let the folks hereabouts know I didn't murder you."

The sheriff drained his glass and nodded to the attendant. "Simon," said he, "it looks like to-day is going to clear up a whole lot of misunderstandings."

"I reckon a man gits his dues," mumbled Bent—"in time."

"What's in the sack?" asked the hotel proprietor, by way of making conversation while the drinks were being poured.

"I've been fishing," replied the young man.

The questioner poked at the bag with an inquisitive forefinger. "Feels like a turtle," he said.

"Here's to God's country," said Bill

Bent, raising the glass that had been set before him. "I have always felt that I would come back some time. I had to come back. I wonder if any of you who have lived here so long know how these prairies get hold of a youngster?"

They felt the tenseness of his gaze, which seemed to take in each of them except Simon Bent, who was hunched in his chair, his wattled chin upon his breast, and his red-lidded eyes wandering from the speaker to the others, and back again, like one who struggles with a fascination.

"It gets hold of some old ones, too," said the sheriff. He wondered why the boy did not smile, why there was no eagerness in his face when he spoke of "God's country."

"It doesn't get hold the way it does with youngsters. It got its grip on me when I first saw it—I couldn't have been more than four, could I, Simon?"

"Jist about four when your father fetched ye."

"I remember waking up one morning when the prairie-schooner was leaving the farmlands and striking across the unbroken prairie. There wasn't a house in sight, and except for the trail we were following, not the faintest sign of a road. It must have been just about this time of the year—April, we'll say—for the willows and cottonwoods along the little creeks were just leafed out, and the grass was still short. It lay like a carpet on the miles and miles of level plain, rolling up here and there over long, low hills. It was a carpet, covered with flowers of every color of the rainbow."

"I still think it was the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. I dream of it yet, sometimes, after listening to music. But even that didn't sink into me as deeply as something else did. Strange dreams come to children out here in these beautiful, lonesome prairies. And because there isn't much else to think about, they dream them all over again and again in the daytime. Sometimes when you're following the herd on your pony, with nothing else in sight, you sort of lose track of yourself and don't know whether you are asleep or awake."

The sheriff, his mind slipping back to his cow-puncher days, nodded assent.

"Well, about daylight of the morning after my father brought me to Simon's, I woke up to find his arms around me. He was telling me that he would come back after me pretty soon, and to be a good boy, so that my mother in heaven wouldn't be worried."

"For days I played on the prairies, and in the draw behind Simon's house, where there seemed to be all the sand in the world. Mrs. Bent would tuck me in at night—she was a very kind-hearted woman, Simon."

The speaker's eyes turned suddenly—darted, it seemed—upon the ranchman. The sheriff, whose ability to sense impending things while they yet brooded in the minds of other men had enabled him more than once to meet startling events halfway, looked from Bill Bent to Simon, who was straightening himself up in his chair, and then to the sack at Bill Bent's feet.

He shifted his chair a little so that he could look straight at the elder Bent. Then he unbuttoned the middle button of his coat, as if the room had suddenly become hot.

"She was a kind-hearted woman, Bill," said Simon with a sort of nasal whine. "It was too bad she got so lonesome in this country."

"She may have been troubled by dreams, too, Simon—the kind of dreams that won't let you rest, but keep coming back to you every day out in the sunshine of the prairie. That was the kind of a dream I had, Simon."

"It was quite a little while after my father had brought me to your place when I had this dream. I thought I was sleeping on the front stoop of your ranch-house. I thought I was awakened by the sound of low voices, and saw you and my father sitting on the steps in the moonlight."

"Because you were talking in low tones as if not to be overheard, I was afraid to interrupt you. I thought my father's horse was grazing in the yard. It was saddled and was eating grass, with the reins thrown over its head. You got up and went into

the house, and I was about to speak to my father when I saw that he had fallen asleep.

"Then I heard you coming. You stood in the door a moment and then—then I thought you struck my father from behind with an ax."

"That was a terrible dream, Bill," said Simon, looking curiously and steadily at the young man.

"There was more of it. I couldn't scream—dreams are that way, you know. I thought I hid my face in the covers and that I heard you dragging something around the house.

"Pretty soon I thought I heard you use the ax on something else, and that there was a sort of nicker from the horse—around there at the back where you were. Then you came and stood by me—I heard you, I thought, and I thought I heard Mrs. Bent, too. She was saying she would tell if you killed me."

Bill Bent's eyes were smoldering again, dark fires between shaggy brows and underhanging shadows.

"A terrible dream that was, Bill," said Simon, his red-lidded eyes twitching but never wavering in their gaze.

The sheriff's hands were clasped loosely across his abdomen.

"It was a terrible dream, Simon, and it has never left me. It stayed with me out among the flowers and grass on the prairie. I never played in the draw again. The dream stayed with me all the years I worked for you—you know I began when I was seven.

"Sometimes I asked myself if it was a dream, and once I asked Mrs. Bent. She said it was a dream, and to forget it. I could forget other dreams, but not this one. It went with me when I ran away. It stayed with me while I fought my way to an education.

"Then at nights when I was reading law it rose up before me. I've been a lawyer for a year, slaving my life out for a big firm. My nerves gave way—and when they went this dream came and danced before my eyes again.

"Finally I went to a specialist. I told him all about my trouble, and the dream.

He made me go over it again and again. Then he told me to come back here and go over the scene of it. I did to-day."

Bill Bent rose and set the sack upon the table.

Simon's eyes followed him curiously. His hands were sunk deep in the pockets of his coat.

"Simon," said Bill Bent, "there was something else the doctor told me. He said it was not a dream!"

"Put up your hands, Simon—empty!" snapped the sheriff. Two revolvers appeared as if by sudden magic out of nowhere in the hands of that officer. Slowly the talonlike claws of Simon Bent emerged from the deep inside pockets of his coat. The red-lidded eyes still stared into the somber ones of the young man.

"Go through him, Jack," ordered the sheriff.

Jacques's first discovery was a rather remarkable set of "gun harness." A holster, containing a short-barreled .45 caliber revolver, hung in each of the capacious pockets, supported by straps which ran between the outer cloth and the lining of the coat, passing in a yoke across the shoulders just where the collar would conceal its presence. The holsters were wide open at the end, so that the weapons might be fired without removing them either from the holster or the pocket.

"What have you got in that sack, son?" asked the sheriff.

"Half of the skull of Simon Bent's brother—my father. And his empty old skin money-belt that refused to rot. You'll find the rest with the skeleton of the horse—the horse that Bent killed because it might have aroused suspicion against him if he had kept it or turned it loose."

The stringy fingers of Simon Bent's hands wriggled spasmodically in the air, like the claws of a vulture that reaches for what it may not seize. His purplish mouth worked horribly, but he could not speak, nor could he take his eyes off the man who had wrought his undoing.

"A man gets his dues, sooner or later," said the sheriff, "and to-day clears up several misunderstandings. So come along, now!"



My Guarantee

If a Santa Fe Special Watch fails to perform its duty properly through original defective material or workmanship it will be replaced by a watch of the same grade or be repaired by us without a cent of expense to the purchaser. This wonderful watch is not only guaranteed by the Santa Fe Watch Company and myself personally but by the great Illinois Watch Factory and will without a doubt last a lifetime and give satisfactory service and is within the reach of every working man.

Alvin Thomas
Pres. Santa Fe Watch Co.

No Better Watches Made

The **ILLINOIS** Famous \$
Santa Fe Special 3.50
21 JEWEL RAILROAD WATCH A MONTH

The Standard Railroad Watch that is **GUARANTEED FOR A LIFETIME OF SATISFACTORY SERVICE.**

These watches are NOW in service on practically every Railroad in the United States and in every branch of the Army and Naval Service. Thousands of them are distributed around the world.

Your name or monogram and any emblem you may desire, will be engraved in the case to suit your own ideas. Write today for my **Free Watch Book**—make your selection.

Save 1-3 to 1-2 on Your Money
—Most Liberal Offer Ever Made

Our "Direct-to-you" low wholesale terms and **EXTRA SPECIAL DISTRIBUTION PLAN** is FULLY EXPLAINED in the New Santa Fe Special booklet just off the press. The "Santa Fe Special" Plan means a **big saving** of money and you get the **BEST** watch value on the market today. **WATCH SENT for YOU to SEE WITHOUT ONE PENNY DOWN.**

Santa Fe Watch Company 857 Thomas Building,
TOPEKA, KANSAS
(Home of the Great Santa Fe Railway)

A letter, post card or this Coupon will bring my beautiful Watch Book **FREE**

SANTA FE WATCH COMPANY,
857 Thomas Bldg., Topeka, Kansas

Please send me your New Watch Book with the understanding that this request does not obligate me in any way.

Name

Address State

Send Coupon Today

Buy a SANTA FE SPECIAL TODAY!
Thru the long period of constant price advancing I have made big sacrifices to hold down the price and to keep this watch within the reach of the thousands who knew its value. Although the dollar has shrunk more than half, my customers are still able to buy this watch without piling on more dollars. The proudest achievement of my business career has been that I have made the value of this watch more staple than the value of government bonds or Uncle Sam's dollars—and that I have made it the most dependable and most satisfactory time keeper on the market and I am still holding down the price. The time is always right with a SANTA FE SPECIAL—Buy TODAY.

The extraordinary prices we are making mean a tremendous sacrifice on our part, owing to the advancing cost of materials and skilled labor.



All we ask is that every man who takes advantage of these extremely low prices will tell his friends about the "Santa Fe Special."



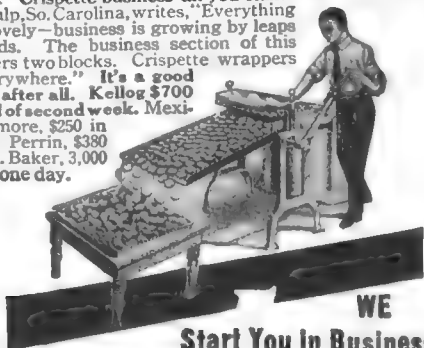
In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

\$365⁷⁵ ONE DAY

Ira Shook of Flint Did

That amount of business in one day

making and selling popcorn Crispettes with this machine. **Profits \$269.00.** Mullen of East Liberty bought two outfits recently. Feb 2 said ready for third. J. R. Bert, Ala., wrote Jan. 23, 1920 "Only thing I ever bought equalled advertisement." J. M. Pattilo, Ocala, wrote Feb. 2, 1920, "Inclosed find money order to pay all my notes. Getting along fine. Crispette business all you claim and then some." John W. Culp, So. Carolina, writes, "Everything is going lovely—business is growing by leaps and bounds. The business section of this town covers two blocks. Crispette wrappers lying everywhere." It's a good old world after all. Kellog \$700 ahead end of second week. Mexiner, Baltimore, \$250 in one day. Ferrin, \$380 in one day. Baker, 3,000 packages one day.



Start You in Business

Little capital, no experience. Teach you secret formula.

BUILD A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN

The demand for crispettes is enormous. A delicious food confection made without sugar. Write me. Get facts about an honorable business which will make you independent. You can start right in your own town. Business will grow. You won't be scrambling and crowding for a job. You will have made your own place.

PROFITS \$1000 A MONTH EASILY POSSIBLE

For full particulars send post card for book shown below. It's free. Do it now.

LONG EAKINS COMPANY

811 High St., Springfield, O.



Government \$2.90 SHOES

Genuine Russet Army Shoes, direct from the **Government Warehouses**, slightly worn, which we are neatly repairing and repolishing. Uppers Guaranteed two years.

THE IDEAL WORK SHOE.

Easily worth \$12.00 wearing value. Our price, \$2.00. Field or Trench Hob Nail Shoe, water proof, slightly worn, guaranteed three years, \$4.25. Mail \$1.00, balance on delivery. Satisfaction guaranteed.

KINGSLEY GOVERNMENT SHOE COMPANY
3850 Cottage Grove Ave., Chicago, Ill.



Learn Auto and Tractor Business

by **RAHE PRACTICAL METHOD** in the oldest and greatest school in America. Twice more equipment used daily than any other auto school.

EARN \$150 to \$400 A MONTH

after a few weeks. Thousands of waiting opportunities ready for your choice, upon graduation here.

WRITE for FREE 68-page Book and proof.



Rahe Auto & Tractor School
World's Oldest and Greatest
Dept. 2052 KANSAS CITY, MO.



Have you a space buyer like Socrates?

Of Socrates it has been said that his reason was stronger than his instinct.

That is perhaps a rare quality, but somehow it is expected to be true of space-buyers. It may be taken for granted that the clients of advertising agents expect it as a matter of course.

Unfortunately, too much space is bought every day on impression, on instinct, on "hunch." It is impossible to *guess* the type of reader attracted by a magazine, or to *imagine* his buying power. These are **FACTS** as real as page sizes and line rates. They must be a part of the space-buyer's equipment.

In the series of advertisements which this announcement inaugurates, Munsey's intends to explain its function and its readers.

MUNSEY'S

Have you thought lately about the 224-line page and its special advantages? To the reader, it possesses all the display value of the larger pages because it is the largest page he is reading; it provides this display at a lower unit cost; and conserves paper.

Reprint from PRINTERS' INK, issue of July 5, 1920.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

ADVERTISING SECTION.

Let Us Send You A Suit



Made to your measure, payable after received, with the clear understanding that if the fit is not perfect or if you are not satisfied in every way, if you are not convinced you have received a fine, high grade, stylish, perfect-fitting, tailored suit made to your measures and have saved \$15.00 to \$20.00, you are not under the slightest obligation to keep it.

Don't hesitate or feel timid, simply send the suit back, no cost to you. You are not out one penny. Any money you may have paid us is refunded at once.

Samples Free Any man young or old interested in saving money, who wants to dress well and not feel extravagant, is invited to write us for our free book of samples and fashions explaining everything. Please write letter or postal today, just say "Send me your samples" and get our whole proposition by return mail. Try it—costs you nothing—just a postal, get the free samples and prices anyway. You will learn something important about dressing well and saving money.

PARK TAILORING COMPANY

Dept. 285

Chicago, ILL.

FREE BOOK



Learn Piano!

This Interesting Free Book

shows how you can become a skilled player of piano or organ in your own home, at one-quarter usual cost. Dr. Quinn's famous Written Method is endorsed by leading musicians and heads of State Conservatories. Successful 25 years. Play chords at once and complete piece in every key, within 4 lessons. Scientific yet easy to understand. Fully illustrated. For beginners or teachers, old or young. All music free. Diploma granted. Write today for 64-page free book. "How to Learn Piano." M. L. Quinn Conservatory, Studio A-8, Social Union Bldg., Boston, Mass.

GET WELL—BE YOUNG—GROW TALL



This University discovery is the most important health invention of the century. It remakes and rejuvenates the Human Body. It produces normal spines. It frees impinged and irritated nerves, corrects contracted muscles, shortens ligaments, eliminates congestion, improves circulation and drainage of the body. It will increase the body's length. **THE PANDICULATOR CO., 1518 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, O.**

DRIVER AGENTS WANTED

To drive and demonstrate 1920, 4-cyl. 37 H. P. BUSH Car.



5-Pass. Touring

116-inch Wheel Base. 158-inch Spring Suspension.

Timken Bearings—Willard Batteries—2-Unit Steering and Lighting—Full Floating Axle. Write at once for the best Automobile Offer in existence—don't wait—prompt shipments. Money-back guarantee. Address J. H. Bush, President, Dept. H180 MOTOR CO., Bush Temple, Chicago, Illinois

THE MUNSEY

NO other standard magazine approaches the Munsey record in putting across successful advertising campaigns single handed. The Munsey has established successful businesses, built factories, made fortunes for advertisers—single handed. The Munsey pays advertisers so richly because Munsey readers have money to spend, ambition to want and initiative to go and get what they want. They go and get The Munsey at the news-stand every month. They go and get any advertised article they want. Have you such an article? Tell the Munsey readers about it and get what you want—results.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

Set in Solid Gold

Set in Solid Gold

Send Your Name and We'll Send You a Lachnite

DON'T send a penny. Send your name and finger size and say, "Send me a Lachnite mounted in a solid gold ring on 10 days' free trial." We will send it prepaid right to your home. When it comes merely deposit \$6.00 with the postman and then wear the ring for 10 full days. If you, or if any of your friends can tell it from a diamond, send it back. But if you decide to buy it—send \$5.00 a month until \$24.00 has been paid. Send your name now. Tell us which of the solid gold rings illustrated above you wish (ladies' or men's). Be sure to send your finger size.

Write Today

Harold Lachman Co., 12 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. C-227, Chicago



\$20
MADE TO MEASURE
3-Piece SUIT

The most remarkable values ever offered. A postal brings you a large assortment of cloth samples, wholesale prices direct from the manufacturer, style book and measuring charts. No matter where you live or where you have been buying your clothes, and even if you do not need a new suit now, investigate at once the wonderful savings you can make by dealing direct with this large manufacturer. Long wear, fast color, perfect fit, and satisfaction guaranteed. Write today. Address your card or letter like this: **Lincoln Woolen Mills Company, Department 425, 208-214 South Green Street, Chicago, Illinois.**

\$2000 to \$5000 now being made by good men by wearing and taking orders for the famous Lincoln made-to-measure clothes. No experience needed, we teach you and furnish free equipment. Write today!

Rider Agents Wanted

Everywhere to ride and exhibit the new **Ranger "Motorbike"** completely equipped with electric light and horn, carrier, stand, tool tank, coaster-brake, mud guards and anti-skid tires. **Choice of 44 other styles, colors and sizes in the famous "Ranger" line.** **DELIVERED FREE on approval and 30 DAYS TRIAL.** Send for big free catalog and particulars of our **Thirty Days Free Trial offer, Factory-to-Rider prices** and terms.

Easy Payments if desired, at a small advance over our regular **Factory-to-Rider cash prices.** **TIRES** Lamps, Horns, Wheels, Sundries, and repair parts and supplies for all bicycles—at half usual prices.



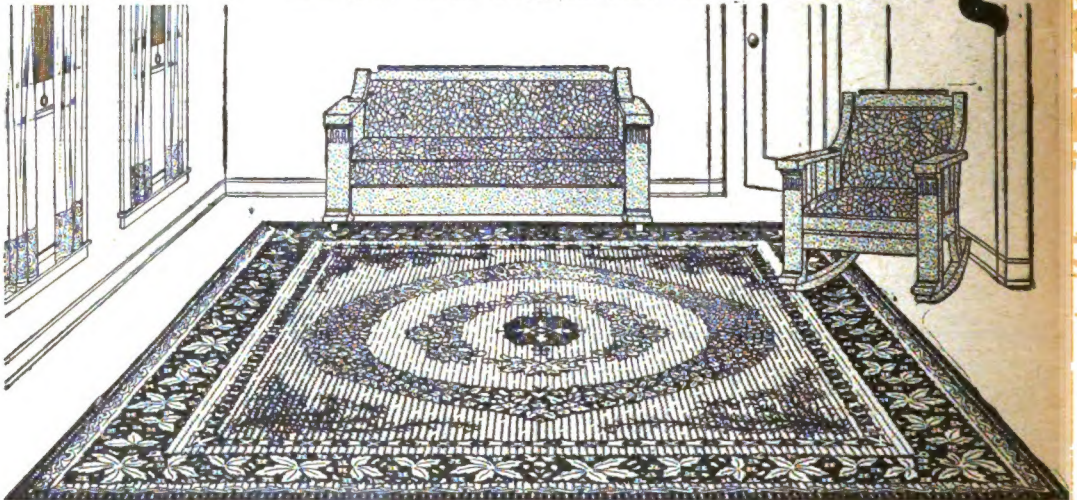
MEAD CYCLE COMPANY
DEPT. D 30 CHICAGO, U. S. A.

STILLS WATER STILLS,

made entirely of heavy copper, one or four gallon capacity. Shipped by prepaid express or parcel post the same day we receive your order. Ideal for distilling water for drinking purposes, automobile batteries and industrial uses. Send for our free booklet giving directions, description and prices.

References:—U. S. National Bank or Bradstreets, Omaha.
BOYER & CO. 504 FARNAM BUILDING
OMAHA, NEBRASKA

9x12 ft. Size Reversible Rug



Only \$1.00 Down

A Wonderful Wool and Fibre Rug Bargain

An expertly woven seamless reversible wool and fibre rug of rich charm and beauty.

"Princess" Wool and Fibre Rug. This is a very pretty pattern in a high grade reversible wool and fibre. It is seamless and the fibre and wool yarns used are of the finest quality, soft and warm and rich looking. The special feature of the rug is that it is reversible. Both sides are equally artistic in coloring and it is absolutely seamless.

The design is unusually attractive. Note the beautiful floral center and graceful border. The rug comes in green, rose, and tan, all the colors being soft and blending harmoniously. The rug because of these soft rich colors and fineness of its fabric is suitable for any room in the house and the fact that it is reversible naturally insures it doubly.

This is really a remarkable rug value and must be seen to be appreciated. Send for it on 30 days free trial. No. A116. 9x12 ft. size. \$24.65. \$1.00 cash. \$2.50 a month.

Money-Back Guarantee! We have no dissatisfied customers and don't want any. Order the "Princess" Wool and Fibre Rug shipped to your home today. If at the end of 30 days you are not entirely satisfied with it, return the rug at our expense and we will refund your dollar and any freight charges you have paid. No special discount from this advertised price.

Easy Payments

You can have this Wool and Fibre Rug shipped to you for a very small payment down. After you receive it, you can examine it carefully and, if it is not satisfactory and up to all you expect it to be, you may return it to us and your original payment will be refunded. If you decide to keep the rug, you can pay the balance in small monthly payments. One price to all, no discount for cash. Send coupon NOW!

Send \$1 and Coupon

Mail them to us today. Have this "Princess" Wool and Fibre Rug shipped to you on thirty days trial.



Pay the balance in easy monthly payments if you are satisfied. Read the coupon and mail it today, now!

L. FISH FURNITURE CO., Dept. C145, Chicago

L. Fish Furniture Co., Dept. C145, CHICAGO, ILL.

Enclosed find \$1.00. Ship special advertised Princess Wool and Fibre Rug No. A116. If I keep the rug I will pay you \$2.50 a month. If not satisfied, I am to return the rug within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight charges I paid.

☐ No. A116-9 x 12 ft. size Princess Wool and Fibre Rug. \$1.00 down, \$2.50 a Month, Total price, \$24.65.

Name.....

Address.....

Post Office..... State.....

If you only want Furniture, Rug, Stove, Phonograph and General Household Catalog, put X in box ☐

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

All Musical Instruments

With Complete Outfits

Free Trial

A New Plan. Wurlitzer will send you any musical instrument you wish for, of the finest quality, with a complete outfit of everything you need, for a full week's trial in your own home. No obligation to buy. If you decide to keep it pay in small monthly sums. Wurlitzer makes complete outfits cost little more than instrument alone.

Outfits include handsome carrying case, velvet and plush lined; self instructor, instruction aids; all attachments and extra parts, books of musical selections, etc.

Wurlitzer plan gives you everything you need at once, on free trial and on easy payments, and at a tremendous saving. Wurlitzer is the largest musical firm in the world today. Wurlitzer musical instruments are standard of the world. Buy the Wurlitzer way. Send for the instrument you wish on trial and judge for yourself.

Convenient Monthly Payments

A few cents a day will pay for your instrument. These Complete Outfits are ready. Send for yours on free trial.

Violin	Flute	Banjo-Ukelele
Cornet	Bugle	Banjo
Saxophone	Fife	Banjo-Guitar
Trombone	Guitar	Ukelele
Mellophone	Mandolin	Hawaiian-Guitar
Trap Drum	Tenor Banjo	Guitar
Clarinet	Banjo	Viola
Piccolo	Mandolin	Cello

Beautiful New Catalog Free Write For It Today

Full details of all instruments and outfits and details of free trial and easy payment offer. Illustrated in color. More pictures and more information about musical instruments than in any other book published. No obligation. Send for the catalog today.

The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co., Dept. C 227
117 E. 4th St., Cincinnati 329 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago

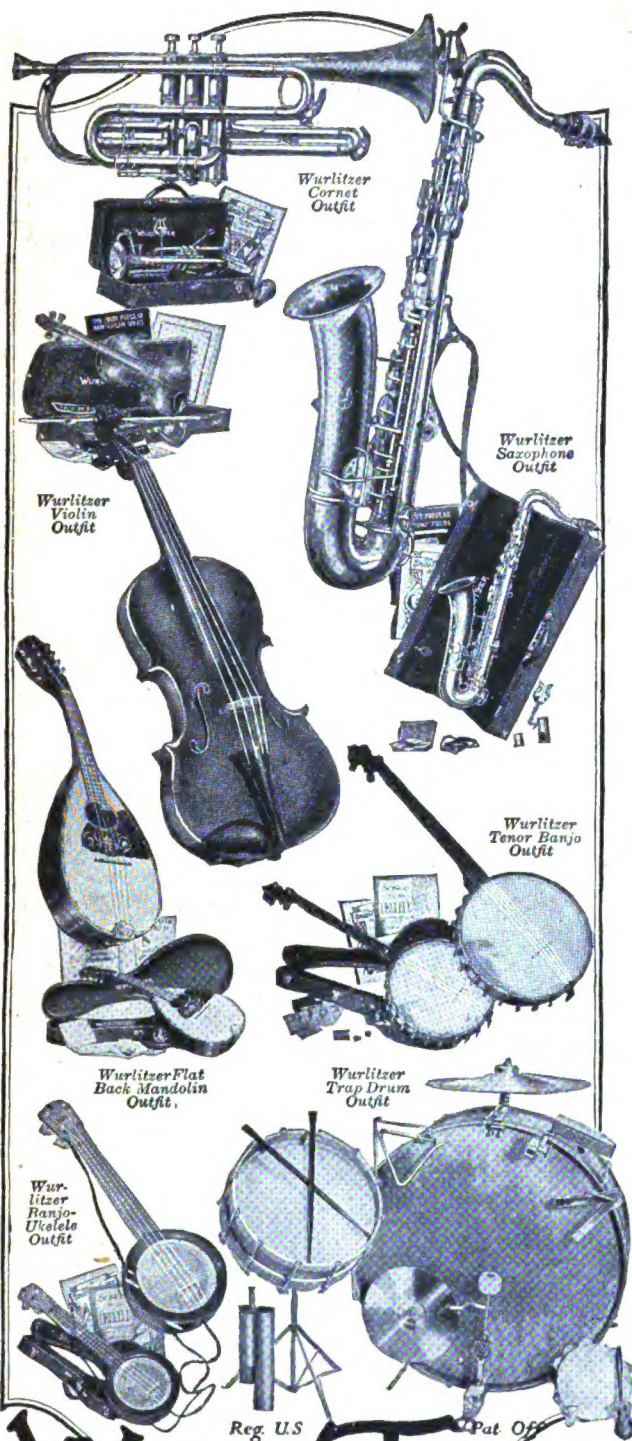
The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co., Dept. C 227
117 E. 4th St., Cincinnati — 329 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago

Send me your new catalog with illustrations in color and full description of the Wurlitzer Complete Outfits and details of the free trial and easy payment offer.

Name

Address

(Musical instrument in which I am especially interested)



Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.
WURLITZER
200 YEARS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MAKING

\$100

Down

Stunning Dress Silk-Satin and Georgette

A splendid bargain we can offer for a limited time only. Send only \$1.00 with coupon. We will send this charming silk satin and georgette dress. Money back instantly if you ask for it after you see dress. Send coupon.

Rich Silk and Gold Braid

This stunning frock is designed in the most becoming style. Waist is of fine silk satin, modeled in becoming neck effect and richly decorated both in front and back with silk and gold braid. Both sleeves and overskirt are of silk Georgette crepe. Sleeves are trimmed with narrow satin bands. The overskirt is elaborately decorated in silk and gold braid and finished with three wide folds of satin, while beneath is a lining of serviceable tussah silk. The drop skirt is of satin to match the waist. Choice of Plum, Navy Blue, Black or Taupe colors. Sizes 34 to 44 and Misses 16 to 20. Give color wanted, also bust, belt, hip and length measurements.

Order by No. F-40. Send \$1.00 with the coupon.
Monthly payment \$4.85. Total price \$29.95.

6 Months to Pay

Open a Charge Account

Learn to buy the Elmer Richards way as thousands of other people are doing. Our original easy payment plan brings you anything in clothing and shoes for men, women and children, and you pay in small monthly sums so low you will never feel them. No charge for credit. Latest styles and strictly dependable qualities only. See for yourself.

Send Coupon

This is a special bargain. Don't be too late. You take no risk. Dress comes on approval. Send the coupon with a \$1.00 P. O. order or a dollar bill. This offer is strictly limited. If you are too late we won't be able to fill your order. Mail coupon—NOW.

Elmer Richards Co. Dept. C227, W. 35th Street
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Elmer Richards Co. Dept. C227 Chicago, Ill.
W. 35th St.

1 enclose \$1.00. Send the Silk-Satin and Georgette Dress No. F-40.

Length.....Bust.....Belt.....Hip.....Color.....
If I am not satisfied with the Silk-Satin and Georgette Dress, I can return it and get my payment back. Otherwise, I will pay the advertised price, \$29.95 on your terms of \$1.00 with coupon, balance \$4.85 monthly.

Name.....

Address.....

State.....



FREE

Write for our Free Bargain Catalog of men's, women's and children's clothing and shoes. Everything on small monthly payments.